LIGHT IN THE OFFING

BY

HILARY DECCAN

So now that shadow of mischance appear'd
No graver than as when some little cloud
Cuts off the fiery highway of the sun,
And isles a light in the offing.

TENNYSON.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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LIGHT IN THE OFFING.

CHAPTER I.

WRECK OF THE 'BELLE TREMAYNE.'

Dirrel Cove was a horse-shoe shaped inlet—a giant's bite—into the cliffs; and was surrounded by a hedge of sharp jagged rocks, that gave no quarter to the doomed ship which might drift within reach of their terrible fangs. Whatever chance the coast-guard had of saving life or property—and many were the brave acts of rescue they achieved, with only the ordinary boats, but more than ordinary skill and daring, to help them—

Dirrel Cove had no record but despair and death. It was the most dangerous spot on all the coast.

As the captain and his man made their way cautiously downward, they could distinguish the figures below in the light of their lanterns. Higher up clinging to the low parapet wall fronting the houses stood the women, silent, awe-struck spectators—if indeed they could be called such where the darkness jealously hid the tragedy that was swiftly drawing to its close outside.

In a few moments the captain was standing by Bradley's side, who was directing the men in charge of the rockets.

'Not got one home?' asked the captain.

'Yes, sir, we've been over them twice.

But they've made no sign, and I'm afraid there ain't a living soul aboard! They burned a blue light half an hour ago, and then she was bearing right on to the rocks.'

The captain shook his head.

'Well, let us have one more try. It's difficult to get to win'nard with those rocks. Aim pretty high.'

As he spoke, another awful illumination showed them the fated ship. She was on her beam ends, and the waves were in the act of dashing the last heaving planks asunder.

A cry arose from the women who had been standing in breathless quiet till now; and some of them fell on their knees and prayed, the tears streaming down their faces in the fitful lantern light.

Bradley dropped the match with which he was about to light another rocket.

'It's all over with her, sir,' he said, turning to his superior, who was silently standing with set lips and knitted brow beside him.

The captain nodded without speaking.

Again a flash. Only a wretched fragment now hung, balanced like a plaything on the rocks for the waves to sport with, as a cat plays with a mouse. A great white column of spray shot over it as they looked; then darkness shut it out again.

But, instantaneous as was the gleam, it revealed another object to the watching eyes. Out in the heavy rolling surge a human form was visible, only for that brief moment. Enough, however, for Weatherly to seize a coil of rope, wind it

round him and tie a lantern round his neck, which he raised higher, by holding the ring in his teeth.

'Weatherly, my lad, no rashness!' said the captain, when he saw his purpose.

'If you please, sir,' cried Weatherly, excitedly, 'don't go for to stop me! Your honor knows I've neither wife or child like the rest—there's nothing to keep me back —an' I can't be a cowardly swab and see a poor fellow critter drown without movin'. Bless your heart, sir—*you're* not the man would say so.'

'Well, well,' said the captain, 'bear a hand all of you. Keep taut the rope, and don't let him out of safe distance.'

The men took hold with anxious faces. There was not one of them who would not have done the same, but for the thought

of the wife standing near, and the little ones sleeping peacefully in their cots through all the terror and noise. But Weatherly was a favourite with every man, woman, and child at the station; and none knew better than they how cruel and treacherous those curling waves could be, nor cared lightly to tempt them with another victim.

A long stone slip ran steeply downwards from the terrace of houses. The chief danger lay in the man's being caught and buffeted by the waves against its sides. The lantern light enabled them to see him as he fought his way out, swimming as best he could, where he was borne like a log, now aloft on white wreaths of foam, now sunk in murky depths, out of sight, as though already in his grave. There was nothing to guide him in his quest,

but instinctively he struck out for the point where the body had been visible for that brief moment of light. The men's faces were set and drawn, as they watched the poor little wavering speck, the feeble light of the lantern, tossed now high in air, then setting backwards with a rush, as though the waves were furious at this puny effort to balk them. Breathlessly they watched; but ever the rope tightened again, and the speck, fluttering, tossing, disappearing for a sickening moment or two of silent horror, yet rising once more while a half-uttered cheer burst from their lips, still advanced, a living, sentient thing, with a purpose. Had there been the faintest signal of distress—the smallest sign of flagging—the strong hands were alert to haul away upon the rope. But no; he was breasting the

waves still, though he must be cruelly spent and battered.

The women had involuntarily drawn nearer, and were standing together close behind the men, with silent, watching faces, and moving lips. They knew better than to utter word or cry; they had seen many a battle with death before now. But their eyes were misty with tears, and they wiped them away with haste, that they might not lose sight for a moment of that tiny, glow-worm light, which meant the life of a man.

And now the light suddenly takes into its circle another dark object. Weatherley strains to reach it. He clutches at the thing, but the waves balk him with fiendish ingenuity. Again!—but he fails. Once more! Yes—he has caught it—he waves a signal!

They haul him in carefully. The sea, with tiger ferocity, rushes after the two limp bodies, raises them aloft, and dashes them forward, returning again and again as if bent on beating out every semblance of humanity, before they are at last drawn with fear and trembling from its clutches. And, behold, when they have landed them, out of reach of the last flying, hissing wave—they are but two dead men!

A wail burst from the white lips of the women. The men, for a moment, stood as if they were dazed, and dropped their hands at their sides. But the captain knelt down quickly, and placed his hand on Weatherly's heart. The sobbing women came round him with clasped hands, and for a breathless moment there was no word spoken.

At first he shook his head. Then he

put his ear close to the big broad breast, so full of manly courage and hope but a little hour ago. Was it Death—oh, was it Death? And who would tell his mother and his sweetheart, the little milliner at Clonmacross? This was what each one of the women was thinking.

But presently the captain drew a long breath, and said, 'Thank God!' and involuntarily the words were echoed all round.

'Yes, the heart is beating. Take him into the watch-house at once. Mrs. Coble, you know what to do. You have everything ready.'

'Yes, sir.'

Willing hands bore him swiftly to the room, where a roaring fire was ready, and the atmosphere was redolent of hot blankets.

The captain went over to where Bradley stood beside the other body.

'Is there any chance of restoring him, think you?'

'Oh, no, sir. The poor chap's been beaten to death on the rocks. His head's stove in.'

One glance indeed was enough. His life's voyage was over—short enough, when all is said and done—over sunken reefs and stormy seas too; but he was safe in port at last.

The captain turned away in silence and walked up to the watch-house. Here he remained directing the men's efforts, at first meeting with so little show of success that the less experienced of them were ready to give way, unnerved by grief. But Bradley and Coble knew better, and cheered them on, and old Mrs. Coble, her

grey hair streaming in wet elf-locks from under her cap, was the bravest of all, and her quick suggestions were readily adopted and found valuable by the eager men.

And so by degrees, like a babe opening its eyes into a new strange world, they brought Ben back out of the shadow of death. With much wonder he looked round upon them all—looked from one smiling, heart-glad face to another, till a broad, slow grin spread over his own face reciprocally, yet with evident puzzlement as to the meaning of the demonstration.

'Dashed if I know what you're all lookin' so jolly about,' he said, still smiling.

And then, as Edson grasped his hand with a delighted chuckle, he sat up and took his bearings. The first thing that met his eye was Mrs. Coble sitting on a coil of rope, dissolved in tears. Then he

was aware that the captain was seated beside him, chronometer in hand, feeling his pulse. And there was a smell of brandy and singed blankets in the air. All these together threw unmistakable light on the situation.

'Why, I haven't gone and got drownded, have I?' he asked, bewilderedly.

'Uncommon near it, my boy,' said old Coble, 'a-tryin' for to save the life of a dead man.'

'Oh, hold on a bit, mates. I remember now. Was the poor chap dead, then?'

'Ay, ay, dead as the Dead Sea.'

'You're certain, sir?' asked Weatherly, turning to the captain.

'Yes, my lad. You precious nearly lost your own life into the bargain. There, lie quiet a bit. Give him a little more warm brandy-and-water, Mrs. Coble, and then

tuck him up in his hammock. He'll do now.'

The day was beginning to break. As the captain looked out, faint angry gleams of red had shot up at the edge of the sea. But heavy clouds obscured the sun, and it was still very dark, and but little less stormy. There was nothing more that they could do; the men were tired and wet.

'Keep a look-out, and let me know if any bodies come ashore,' said the captain.

'Ay, ay, sir.'

'I'd better go along with you, sir,' said Edson. 'It's still blowing a whole gale, and you'll want a light.'

But the captain required no such attention. The light was coming into the sky in a slow, half-ashamed way. It was no

wonder, indeed, if Nature was reluctant to look upon her night's work.

The wind had somewhat abated, though it still was fierce enough to give the captain plenty to do to make way against it. But fortunately he turned his back upon it after ascending the steps, and so got blown along on his homeward road pretty smartly.

And, while all this had been going on down at the Cove, Gwenda spent an anxious and restless night. As she found it impossible to sleep, she dressed and went downstairs, where she heaped up a large fire, and got coffee and food ready for her father. Then she lay down on the sofa, and tried to feel as if she were resting. But with the knowledge of all that was likely to be enacting only one short

mile away—with the sound of the tempest and the sea filling her heart with dread and sorrow—she could do nothing but listen, and send up fervent, voiceless prayers for the ship and her crew now in mortal peril. Every gust of wind made her tremble and hide her eyes in the cushion, as if to shut out the visions of drowning men—the white faces and limp hands—that would gleam in the light of the morning sun!

Unable to bear inaction longer, she started shuddering to her feet, and began to pace the room. The peat was not burning well—probably damp—so she took a tiny pair of bellows from its nail at the fireside, and began to blow till the golden sparks flew out, and a ruddy glow filled the room with warmth.

Then at last the first faint streak of

daylight showed through the curtains. Another half-hour's wait;—and without any warning—for no steps could have been heard—a quick tap on the window makes her start like a deer for the door. As she opens it, a swish of rain rushes in, and her father hurriedly enters, and has to use all his strength to close and fasten the door again. His oilskins are shining with wet, and the line of his bushy eyebrows is defined by tiny dew-drops that glitter in the light of Gwenda's candle.

'Wait a bit, lassie. I'll leave all this wet stuff here in the porch.'

He peeled off the oilskins and sou'-wester, and flung them in a heap on the stone floor; then, having kicked off his long boots, Gwenda brought his well-warmed slippers, and with a sigh of relief he went with her to the dining-room. There

he threw himself wearily into his arm-chair, and sighed again.

Gwenda had put on the coffee to warm, and was now standing, wistfully waiting for news.

'Did you do any good, father? Did you save the ship?' she asked, eagerly.

'No,' answered the captain, mechanically resorting to his old habit and rumpling up his hair. 'No—not a plank of her.'

'Oh!—and the crew?'

'There's not a living soul left to tell even the name of the ship!'

Gwenda clasped her hands with a stifled sob, and turned away.

She saw how much he was affected by the disaster, and refrained from further questioning.

'Not one saved!' he repeated sadly, shaking his head. 'The vessel is shivered to splinters on the Swords. We won't gather as much of her as would fill a match-box! And, more than that, we were precious near losing Ben Weatherly into the bargain!'

'Losing Ben! Oh, father, how was that?'

'The fellow's rash,' said the captain. 'Upon my soul, he's—he's—absurdly rash, you know. In point of fact, he ought to have had a round dozen for wantonly endangering the life of one of Her Majesty's servants as he did—and—why, I found myself wringing his hand instead, and calling him a fine fellow—and a d——d fine fellow he is!' cried the captain, with a slap of his leg, and letting fly the strong

expression with as much velocity and as little apology as the cork from a bottle of soda-water.

And—pray forgive her, most courtly and well-trained reader—Gwenda forgot to be shocked!

'Of course you did, father,' she cried, her eyes sparkling, and lips parted with eagerness. 'Tell me about it.'

So her father went over all the story between his sips of coffee, and Gwenda listened—sadly indeed, for it was a sad tale—but with much admiration for Ben's courage and congratulation on his escape.

And though her father shook his head over his toast, and called it rash!—infernally rash!—she knew that it was exactly the sort of rashness that George Chetwynd

had himself been given to—away back in the century's teens—when his hair was brown, and when 'George the Third was king.'

CHAPTER II.

THE OWNER ARRIVES.

Next day was still stormy, but, as the sun rose higher in the sky, the rain ceased, and the gale moderated a little.

Gwenda looked anxiously out from her window. Oh, the cruel white breakers! How beautifully they glitter, shooting up sudden white columns of spray in the sun as if in innocent play, fringing the rocks everywhere on all that long coast line; and while they laugh and wake the echoes in a thousand caves, and dash over the

sweet sea-pinks that grow on the foremost ledges, and whisper soft music in the ears of rainbow coloured shells,—down there in the shadows of the brooding rocks lie the dead men, with wide eyes turned to the sweet blue heaven, clutching the tangles of seaweed in their stiffened hands. Every one of those sporting waves rocks them to and fro, even as mothers rocked them in downy cradles, long ago! Mothers who even now are listening to the wind, and praying for fine weather to waft that ship to port; and each, hoping and fearing, knows not that there is not as much of her planks left as will make her boy a coffin!

Gwenda leant on the window ledge, and thought of all this till her eyes were dim with tears. But her father's step on the stairs roused her, and she made haste to join him.

While they sat at breakfast, the watchman's tap came to the door.

'Well, Bradley; come inside.'

Bradley, the chief boatman, stepped inside the door, saluting Gwenda and his superior in his usual quiet fashion.

'Signal up from Sandy Bay, sir; vessel ashore. All hands safe.'

'Bless my soul!' said the captain. 'We can't spare any men from here. Signal to Black Point for three. But they must come by land. 'Twill take most part of a day.'

'Yes, sir.'

'Anything further at Dirrel Cove?'

'There's been the bodies of three men and a child washed in, sir.'

'A child?—good heavens!' said the captain.

'Yes, sir, a little boy of five or six.'

'Oh, Lord!—that looks as if the captain's wife were with him.'

'I'm afraid it does, sir.'

'Well, you'd better send that message at once to Black Point. I'll wait and see it answered, and then go down myself to Dirrel.'

'All right, sir.'

And Bradley, the taciturn, withdrew to send the required signal to the third and most distant station, communication with which was generally made by sea, as the land journey, following the sweep of the bay, was fully twice the distance.

The captain's appetite was not particularly good this morning; in a few minutes he had finished breakfast and was out with Bradley, waiting for the answering signal.

Bradley kept the telescope steadily focussed on the Point.

'There it is now, sir. They've run up "Message received. Coming."'

The captain took the glass, and satisfied himself of the signal.

'Well, that's all we can do at present. Signal to Sandy Bay "Men coming."'

'Yes, sir.'

So, while Bradley went to make new arrangements of flags and balls, the captain took his way to the Cove.

With Gwenda the day passed drearily. Feeling restless and sad, she wandered out into the square enclosure at the back of the house which was dignified with the title of 'garden.' It was intersected with a few straight walks, bordered with box that only grew here and there as it listed, in a scrubby, unornamental fashion, as if

put out of spirits by the proximity of melancholy cabbage-stumps and onion-beds that were all run to seed.

Flowers there were none—excepting one queer, ugly purple thing that Gwenda never remembered to have seen anywhere else, and which flourished strangely in odd corners among the vegetables. And on the shady side, next the house, horse-radishes had grown so long unmolested that they formed a regular thicket, in which great black slugs and speckled snails lived to a good old age without let or hindrance.

Once, indeed, their numbers had been decimated, and the whole tribe threatened with extinction. For a boy had brought to the Tower a large gull with a broken wing, and the captain, with a shilling, ransomed the bird, and let him loose

within the precincts of this Eden. There, with right good will, he set himself to the work of gobbling up everything in the shape of snail, beetle, and caterpillar that ventured to move as much as a feeler. But, alas! speedy retribution overtook him; for, meeting with a particularly large and hard-shelled snail, he made a valiant attempt to bolt it whole, and incontinently choked himself! After which the snail community began once more to possess their shells in peace.

Gwenda paced the long straight walks for awhile, which at least had the merit of being sheltered. It amused her to note the queer effects of Pat's desultory gardening. He seemed to have mixed all his seeds together before planting, for cabbage and cauliflower were cheerfully interspersed with beetroot, while parsley and

spinach had a struggle for possession in the next plot.

Gwenda had long ago discarded his services in the mast-yard, round which she had her own little circle of flowers. If she wanted help, Edson, with that incomprehensible faculty sailors have for knowing a great deal about everything on land, in a handy way, while they have spent most part of their lives at sea, was delighted to give it to her. So the mast-yard under his hands became a gay *parterre*—not, indeed, with evanescent Dutch roots or semi-distortions that their honest progenitors would utterly fail to recognise, but with the rich velvet glow of sweet-William and purple pansies winking in the sun, and Canterbury-bells that rang sweet peals in the summer breeze, though only the fairies heard them.

The wind was blowing chilly, and Gwenda was getting tired of her monotonous walk, when Nellie came to announce that Norah was in the kitchen. Gwenda accordingly went inside, and found Norah, as usual, prepared for the road.

'But it's terribly stormy, Norah. You cannot walk against the wind.'

'Oh, but indeed I can, miss. I'd a dale sooner be walkin' agin the wind nor sittin' ayant there listenin' to it.'

'It must have been terrible for you last night, Norah—your house is so near the sea.'

'Oh, yis, miss, it was terrible. Oh, but it was like that night—that night!—when he was drowned!'

She seemed unconsciously speaking her thoughts aloud.

'Who, Norah,—who was drowned?'

'Wid the waves dashin' up white an' cowld—like the snow—an' the fire o' judgment in the sky, and the winds on the say roarin'! Oh, 'twas the same—all jist the same that night! Wirasthru!'

'Oh, was it your husband, Norah? Was he drowned?'

Norah moved her hands with a sudden grief-stricken action. Then, as suddenly, she became stony, quiet, self-repressed. She clasped her bony hands on her knee, and drew in her breath.

''Twas in the fishin', miss,' she answered, slowly, 'wid a storrum—like that!'

'Oh, it is terrible,' cried Gwenda, 'the life that is lost at sea! And not one was saved last night—not one.'

'No, miss, not a crathur. Lord be marciful to their sowls!'

'Did you go down to the beach, Norah?'

'Did I go down, is it? Och, was there iver a storrum that I didn't stand wid my bare head undher it? Ochone! an' run into the say, too, whin there's crathurs drownin'! If I could save wan life—maybe—maybe——'

Here her voice sank, and she seemed to mutter prayers, while she crossed herself. She had forgotten her auditors, and Nellie, standing in the background, wide-eyed, held her breath.

Never before had they heard Norah touch on her own personal history. Ordinarily she was as reticent as the grave. But it was evident that she was strangely stirred and shaken by the sad events of the night.

''Tis hard indeed,' said Gwenda,

'terribly hard, to look on at such a scene, yet have no power to save!'

'But I prayed,' Norah muttered, rocking herself as she looked straight before her with stormy eyes, 'an', maybe, 'twill be heard out o' the storrum an' the lightnin'. But the say was always laughin' at me, an' sayin' over an' over again, "Bad luck to him! bad luck!" Ah, I'll hear it in my grave!'

It was evident that poor Norah's mind was half unhinged by superstitious remorse, and last night's terrible tragedy had completely broken down her iron front.

Gwenda felt it sacrilege to probe the wound—so long hidden, so long unhealed. So she turned away, and affected to busy herself with her note-book.

Peggy was called and consulted as to

the additional stores required for Christmas, and, while they talked, Norah came gradually to herself, as if waking out of a dream.

'It's a'most time for me to be goin', Miss Gwendy,' she said, as the clock struck.

She was apparently quite unconscious of having betrayed the workings of her soul for once so freely.

Gwenda gave her as many orders as she could devise, and allowed her to depart, with the same arrangement of basket and cloak, the same swift camel-like gait, grave, silent, immovable once more. Not till she was well down the avenue did Nellie venture to stir or speak.

'Ah, holy Vargin, it's thrue thin! Sure enough, I heerd my mother sayin' it long ago, whin I was a bit ov a child. It was Norah

herself, God help her, that brought the harum to him! They'd jist had a hard word betune 'em—she an' him—jist the bit o' temper an' no more, an', widout knowin' what she was doin', she cried "Bad luck to ye!" as his foot was on the boat! Oh, the poor crathur! she has it on her sowl now, sleepin' an' wakin'!'

'An' he *was* drownded?' asks Peggy, open mouthed.

'Ov coorse, he was,' answers Nellie, indignant at the implied possibility of doubt, 'an' ivery sowl along wid him! An' that's why Norah is niver away whin there's a wreck; an' many an' many a sowl she's prayed to glory, kneelin' on the stones o' the beach till mornin' light.'

'Poor Norah,' said Gwenda. 'Be careful never to drop a word before her that would show she had betrayed herself. I

am sure she would not at another time have told us this.'

'Is it me, miss? Faith, I wouldn't say a word to Norah about the like, for a purse of goold! Blessid hour! I'm more afraid of her, than ov the praste himself!'

Which, indeed, as far as Father Tom was concerned, she might be.

Again, as night drew on, the storm increased; and the wind succeeded in tearing off some heavy slates from the roof and carrying them like paper into the field in front. But this was all the indignity the old Tower could suffer. Let the gale howl and buffet as it might, the grim walls felt it no more than the brush of a bat's wing. Through all the dark hours it raged; till gradually, as the tardy dawn drew near, its strength was spent, and the tempest quieted down imperceptibly, with sobs

and sighs, like the tired-out passion of a child.

And when the sun rose—on the morning of Christmas Eve—it was in a sky of stainless, dazzling blue; every cloud had been blown away, clean out of sight. The gulls had it all to themselves up there; they were wheeling about, filling the air with clamant cries, their wings gleaming snow-white in the sunshine. They were discussing the prospects of fair weather; and by degrees they drifted farther and farther out towards the sea.

The captain, standing with his hands in his jacket-pockets at the window, nodded his head, as if satisfied with the aspect of things.

'Now, let us have this for twenty-four hours, and we may manage to get near the wreck,' he soliloquized. 'Such a sea

as is out there won't go down much before that.'

To-day he was bound for Sandy Bay. The vessel ashore there was still in some danger, and the men required direction in trying to get her off. So, having first waited to fill up his log, the captain started about noon in his gig, taking Dirrel Cove on the way.

As he drove downward, he scanned the sea with an experienced eye, noting the glittering ring of foam round the rocks, bursting upwards now and again to the very tops of the cliffs in thin, vapoury snow showers. Noting, too, that outside the sea was a dark bright blue, ruffled a good deal, but free of the ominous 'white horses.'

'Ay, ay, we'll get a chance to-morrow if this weather holds,' was his verdict.

He found the watchman at the head of the steps ready to take charge of the gig, and without delay the captain descended to the terrace, along which lay the straight line of the white-fronted houses. He met Bradley coming out of the watch-house.

'Well, Bradley, anything more washed in?'

'Yes, sir, three more bodies—the captain and two sailors. And several bales of Manchester goods. And the owner's arrived, sir.'

'The owner?'

'Yes, sir. Mr. Langdale of Manchester.'

'But—what the deuce!—we've got no telegraphs here. How can the news have reached him?'

'He was in C——, sir. And the agents got news of a ship being wrecked that

answered to the description of the *Belle Tremayne*—that's her name, sir, and she was laden with gingham, and bound for Calcutta.'

'Where is he, then? What have you done with him?' asked the captain, with a puzzled look towards the watch-house, as though under a vague impression that Bradley had stowed him away in the store press, along with sundry pots of paint, coils of tarry rope, and other strong-smelling properties, to remain till called for.

'Gone out to the wreck, sir.'

'What?' cried the captain, turning and looking out to where the black points of the Swords were continually disappearing behind the white showers of spray that sprang from the dark shadows at their sides with the regularity of a clock. 'Gone

to the wreck!—a landsman!—in that sea! Who has he with him?'

'Edson, and Weatherly, and Park, and Coble, sir.'

'Humph! Well, Coble won't be rash, at any rate. How the deuce did they get *him* hauled into it?'

'Coble, sir? Well, he *did* tell 'em 'twas two chances to one they'd never see land again, but if they were bent upon it he'd see 'em through it.'

''Pon my soul,' said the captain, taking off his cap to ruffle his hair, 'lunacy must be catching. And—if he does see land again, which, by George! is tolerably doubtful—what is the gentleman going to do after?'

'Why, sir, I'm afraid he'll find himself in a bit of a box! He'd sent back his car to Clonmacross before we had time to warn

him—told me he would take his chance of a night's lodging at a farm. I don't know of a house within ten miles, sir, that I would put a dog to sleep in. And—it being against rules as far as we are concerned—I think he will have to walk back to Clonmacross, sir.'

'Oh, bless my soul, we can't let him do that! You must tell Mr.—Langdale, did you say?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Ah, Langdale and Co.—big manufacturers in Manchester. Well, tell Mr. Langdale that he is perfectly welcome to stay at the Tower for as long as is necessary. The man might as well look for a bed in the desert of Arabia as anywhere hereabouts. It'll be a matter of some days at the least before any real work can

be begun at the wreck, but he had better be at hand in case any part of the cargo, can be turned to account. Show him the way up through the fields, and tell him Miss Chetwynd and myself will be glad to see him at dinner at five o'clock. Now, I must start for Sandy Bay.'

'Yes, sir,' answered the imperturbable Bradley.

And the captain got into his gig and drove off in haste.

Gwenda, delighted at the advent, so long waited for, of fine weather, started for a walk as soon as her father left. To-day she did not care to go seawards; her soul sickened at the thought of the hurly-burly of the waves. Rather would she take the quiet monotony of the road to

the cross, sheltered between the high gorse hedges, with nothing in the shape of prospect but the cluster of cottages below, and distant undulation of field and hedge stretching away behind.

It was delicious to feel the fresh, keen breeze upon her cheek once more, as she walked quickly along over wind-swept roads, already dry with the help of the sunshine; and to look down on the long stretch of country, with never a shadow anywhere—everywhere blinking and glowing in strong white light.

Passing the open doors of the little cabins, she gave and received many a smiling salutation; at one, she found a rheumatic old grandfather sunning himself; at another a curly-headed urchin hanging over the half-door—a useful institution for keeping the children in, and the pig

out—and stopped to give him the lump of sugar which she generally brought out for such chance meetings.

Then when she had passed the little chapel, very white, and stony, and new, there was nothing again but the long, white road, sometimes hedged, sometimes not—where the land on each side was poor boggy stuff full of rushes and bog-cotton, with long flags fringing the murmuring water-courses.

This was the road to Clonmacross, which Norah trudged morning and evening. To the lover of scenery it had nothing whatever to recommend it, yet for Gwenda it had some charm: it was lonely and quiet; plovers haunted the untilled land; she liked to listen to their wild calls, and watch them wheeling and diving, sometimes in great noisy crowds, back and

forward as she walked. And, in summer evenings long ago, she had ridden along there often on her pony, with her father, and come home laden with the yellow flag blossom and great baskets of fern and moss. Now, the moss was too wet to gather, though fresh, and green as emeralds, and the flags were all brown, with great black seed-pods instead of flowers.

She turned at last reluctantly towards home, when the sun had begun to sink westwards, and the wind, missing its warmth, blew chill. It was always, go where she would, a long toil uphill to the Tower.

When she reached the house, she went in as usual by the back door to the dining-room. The freshness of the wind was on her lips and cheeks, the brightness of the sky in her eyes. She had a half hope of

finding her father there before her; not seeing him she went on to the little drawing-room, her bonnet and wraps on her arm.

She had got well inside the door before realising the fact that there was some one sitting writing at the table, and that it was *not* her father!

And very cool and much at home he seemed to be; for while she stood so near, silent and wondering, he went calmly on with his writing, giving her time enough to note his appearance with more and more surprise. For, albeit Gwenda's experience in that direction was very little greater than Miranda's, like her too she thought she had 'no ambition to see a goodlier man.' As yet she could only observe the broad sweep of the forehead, with its straight clear lines of eyebrows

contrasting with a somewhat pale complexion, and a firm chin, and mouth shaded by a small dark moustache.

Scratching away with the captain's long feathered quill, he said presently, in a lazy, autocratic sort of tone. 'Get me a candle, will you—' not taking the trouble to lift his head.

But Gwenda failing to start with the alacrity of a Nubian slave on this errand—she was indeed too much astonished to move at all—the stranger ceased scratching at the rate of twenty miles an hour, and looked up.

Then he rose suddenly, as if slightly—only slightly—taken aback. For there was something about this young man which gave one the impression that he was not often shaken out of his equanimity. And standing erect with his hands

on the chair-back he showed himself tall and broad-shouldered, with a graceful, well-knit figure.

For a second or two he remained silent, taking in the situation. Then, as Gwenda appeared to be awaiting some explanation, he gathered himself together.

'I beg a thousand pardons! I was actually dolt enough to take it for granted you were the servant who had shown me in.'

'A natural mistake,' answered Gwenda, smiling. 'She had of course told you I was out.'

The young man took inward note of the fact that the smile revealed perfect teeth; that the eyes his own were looking down into reminded him of the deep shadows under the rocks he had seen to-day; that altogether the face before him was one of

the most beautiful it had ever been his luck to encounter.

'But you cannot have the least idea why I happen to be sitting here, making free with Captain Chetwynd's writing materials, and giving autocratic orders for candles, as if I were a hungry Russian! It is amazingly forbearing of you not to ring the bell and have me chucked out instanter.'

'Oh, no, that would be too hasty. I am willing to hear what you have to say for yourself.'

'I am really most grateful. Well, I happen to be the ill-fated owner—no, that is not it—the owner or rather his representative—of the ill-fated ship, the *Belle Tremayne* wrecked at Dirrel Cove. It's a shame to talk flippantly about it, though, for no doubt you are aware that every

soul on board was lost along with her.'

'Yes,' answered Gwenda.

'I came here from C—— this morning, and while trying to get at the wreck—which I entirely failed to do—Captain Chetwynd arrived at the station, and was good enough to rescue me from the dilemma I had got myself into, by leaving a message, offering me shelter for a time under his roof—there being absolutely no other roof fit for anything rather more fastidious than a pig to sleep under, within ten miles. I need not say that the offer was most gratefully accepted.'

'Then you have not yet met my father?' said Gwenda.

(Her father? Then what on earth had put it into his head that Miss Chetwynd was an exemplary old maiden lady, with

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grey buckled curls, and black mittens, and immovably orthodox views on the Church question?)

'Your father—you are Miss Chetwynd?'

'Yes.'

'Pray excuse me, I have not told you *my* name yet. It is Langdale—Geoffrey Langdale. I am acting for my father in this business, and was busy writing to him when you came in.'

'Then I have delayed you too long already. But how are you to get your letter posted?'

'I have a messenger waiting—an urchin—who undertakes to run with it all the way to Clonmacross, without once stopping to take breath. Do you think he will?'

'Oh, yes,' said Gwenda, 'they are curi-

ously faithful in that way. As your letter is ready for sealing, I had better send you the candle now.'

'A thousand thanks!' he answered, still standing, as she left him with a slight bow and smile.

For some moments his letter lay untouched, though he had, a little while before, been concerned as to the possibility of catching that night's post. Instead of resuming it, Mr. Geoffrey Langdale threw himself back in his chair, and fell into idle speculation and wonderment.

How did such a beautiful, high-bred looking girl come to be here in this extraordinary, out-of-the-way place? A girl with manners fit for a princess, and eyes—such eyes!—sweet and clear and—true! Yes, it was the *truth* in them that made their charm—for they *were* charming; not

the least shadow of doubt about that.

And how did he, Geoffrey Langdale, come to be domiciled under the very same roof with this vision of loveliness, and likely to have the privilege of seeing her for as long as—the captain might see fit to keep him?

Vaguely he began to speculate as to what sort of man this Captain Chetwynd might be. Having such an undeniably lovely daughter, was it exactly—well, was Mrs. Grundy banished out of Ireland along with the toads and snakes; or did the faith of the lady of the snow-white wand extend even to these latest days?

And yet—when he thought of the horrors of a night—even one!—in an Irish cabin, he felt himself to be an ungrateful wretch, unworthy of the hospitality so opportunely extended to him.

Here Nellie's entrance with the candle stayed him at what may be considered a very becoming and salutary point in his reflections; and as she further brought a respectful hint from the messenger that 'it was gettin' powerful late, an' he was beginnin' to be the laste bit in the wurrld afraid it might bate him to catch the post,' Geoffrey hastily sealed his letter and gave it into her hands.

Then, on looking at his watch, he found it was approaching five o'clock, so withdrew to the room in which Nellie had put his valise, and made the best toilet possible under the circumstances.

A quarter-of-an-hour after, he found Captain Chetwynd awaiting him in the tiny drawing-room. His host, as he came forward, gave an unmistakable start, and stared at him curiously.

'Did I understand rightly—that you were Mr. Langdale—the owner of the *Belle Tremayne?*'

'Not the owner—I am his son, and acting for him. I am Geoffrey Langdale.'

'Oh!' said the captain; and then he pushed up his hair, and gazed again at Geoffrey like a bewildered cockatoo. 'Bless my soul! I was expecting to find an elderly gentleman with grey hair—or perhaps a wig. Langdale, of Langdale and Co., is a man of sixty-five or so, I know.'

'Yes, that is about my father's age.'

The captain put his hands in his jacket pockets, and walked to the window. Then he walked back again, and looked at his guest in a queer, half-puzzled, half-scrutinizing way, that gave Geoffrey some secret amusement.

By this time he quite understood the position. The old sailor had innocently supposed that he was admitting to the sacred precincts of his hearth nothing more alarming than the furrowed visage of Langdale *père*, and now Geoffrey's impertinent speculations regarding Mrs. Grundy were being scornfully refuted. That excellent lady was even now tapping the captain on the shoulder, and frowning and shaking her head at him.

'I am afraid I am here under false pretences,' said Geoffrey. 'You expected my father, and find only his unworthy son. After all, sir, you may prefer lending me your horse to Clonmacross.'

'No, no, my lad,' cried the captain, to whom the very thought of such churlish treatment was intolerable; 'give me your hand. I like your looks, and, by George,

you shall be welcome! I've no wife to do the honours, and—well, we'll treat you as if you *were* your own father.'

Geoffrey read for himself the meaning that lay unexpressed in these incoherent words. He returned the hand-shake with interest, and the two men looked into each other's eyes.

In a few moments Gwenda made her appearance, and they went in to dinner.

Geoffrey Langdale was a somewhat fastidious young man; moreover, he had formed exaggerated notions of the backwardness and general lack of life's amenities of the country he was now seeing for the first time. It was, therefore, rather a surprise to him to find himself sitting down to a well-appointed dinner; everything round him speaking of quiet refinement and taste. The table was brightened

by some quaint old silver, well-chosen glass, and a pretty arrangement of berries and leaves—an addition, in those days, not so much *de rigueur* as it has since become. The soft light of candles was shed from old-fashioned silver branches, and Geoffrey inwardly noted its becomingness in the case at least of the one lady present.

Gwenda was dressed, as her father liked to see her, in some white, woollen material with old lace ruffles, above which her delicate complexion showed like a flower. Ornaments of any description she rarely wore—not even the few simple jewels which had been her mother's, and which lay in their little case upstairs along with a lock of her brown hair.

While Geoffrey talked with the captain, he noticed that Miss Chetwynd seemed

content to leave the conversation very much to themselves, yet by no means in so marked a manner as to appear ungracious; when she did take part in it, he was struck with the appositeness and piquancy of her remarks. Once or twice, indeed, she could have set them right in certain small questions under debate, matters of acquaintance with the habits of the people; but it was not till directly appealed to by her father that she did so.

This was altogether a new experience for Geoffrey Langdale. I am afraid he had till now run much risk of being spoiled. Most certainly it was unusual for him to find a young lady absent or indifferent in his company. He began unawares to exercise himself a little as to the possible reason for Gwenda's reserve—till

the coxcombical nature of the inquiry struck him all of a sudden. 'What a conceited jackass he was, to be sure!'

A wholesome frame of mind, Mr. Geoffrey Langdale, and much to be encouraged! A proof, too, that these new surroundings of yours are likely to be conducive to your ultimate good—as, no doubt, your excellent maiden aunt would put it.

But the old leaven in him awoke a feeling of pique he would have been slow to acknowledge. If he could, he would have persuaded himself that the grapes were sour—that this country beauty was shy and awkward—dazzled into silence by the splendour of his Olympian majesty.

But, meeting the full light of her grey eyes, he became uncomfortably conscious that they were as coldly critical as his own. He felt he was being weighed—and

had misgivings even that he might be found wanting!

Again, all very new and salutary, good Mr. Geoffrey Langdale!

The conversation naturally turned upon the wreck.

'By George!' said the captain, 'I was taken aback, I can tell you, when they told me a landsman—and an elderly one, as I thought—had gone out in such a sea this morning. It was plucky of you; but, nevertheless, nothing short of madness!'

'It was idiotic, of course—as I found out soon enough. The proverb says, "Fools rush in," et cetera. But at least I learned from it something of how men-o'-war s men can manage a boat. By Jove! if our fellows at Henley had a chance of seeing it, 'twould stop their brag a bit!'

'You can handle an oar, then?'

'Tolerably—on smooth water.' He was stroke at Cambridge.

'I am not surprised at your getting to the weak side of Edson and Weatherly; the fellows are always ready to risk their lives for the pure excitement of the thing. But Coble's going with you amazed me!'

'Oh, the old fellow said he could not stay on shore and see us drowned, so he cheerfully accepted the *rôle* of Charon: that we are *not* all in Hades now seems so great a surprise to him as to verge on disappointment. I suppose he must lose prestige as a prophet after this.'

'How on earth did you manage to appear so quickly on the scene? Official news of the wreck could not possibly reach Manchester quick enough to have brought you.'

'I was in C——, had volunteered to go there to intercept the *Belle Tremayne*—my father having new sailing orders for the captain. I found she had already left. But, while I was talking to the agents, a clerk brought in the news of a ship answering exactly to her description having gone to pieces at Dirrel Cove. I posted down at once on chance, but could not verify the identity of the vessel till I had inspected the wreck.'

'Then have you been able to do that?'

'Yes, that only. We picked up part of the stern of a boat with the name on it.'

As soon as the wine and nuts were placed on the table—according to the fashion of the day, on the bare mahogany, which reflected the ruby glow in the decanters like a mirror—Gwenda left them.

Geoffrey, as he held the door open for her, thought that the slight bow she gave him was unnecessarily cold and distant.

Rejoining the captain at the fire-side, he sank into a quiescent state, lazily cracking walnuts while he listened to the veteran's yarns. Exciting experiences, too, they were; but to-night his thoughts were disposed to wander, and he fell into a reverie which lasted through the taking of a large part of the French fleet—proving himself, however, in the captain's eyes, a most excellent listener.

At eight o'clock they adjourned to the drawing-room, where Gwenda was sitting reading. A little copper kettle sang merrily on the brass trivet, and the pretty Queen Anne silver was on the table. Gwenda made tea, and Geoffrey, watching her doing so, thought he had never seen

more beautiful hands—'and no rings, thank heaven!'

His dislike to the latter form of jewelry was perhaps accentuated by recollections of scenes where the poor but virtuous peasant comes upon the stage with a large diamond or two sparkling on her toil-worn finger. In the present case, however, he only felt with the poet, that 'beauty unadorned' is still 'adorned the most.'

Gwenda had thrown aside her book when they entered, and Geoffrey, finding it beside him on the sofa, took it up and looked at the title-page. It was an early edition of the poems of Alfred Tennyson, and on the fly-leaf was written 'Gwendolyn Chetwynd, from her loving father.'

Their reading was very well up to date here, that was evident. He thought he would like to know which were her

favourite poems. If he were really to stay here for a week or two, was she at all likely to throw off some of that reserve, and let him talk to her?

And then he thought of what the captain's eyes had said to him that afternoon. But looking at Gwenda, as she sat calmly arranging her tea-table, he told himself that here at any rate was no impressionable damsel, ready to immolate herself at the wheels of his chariot. The captain's scruples, it was clear, could not refer to that 'maiden meditation—fancy free.'

Was she fancy free, though? Could he read that in those truthful eyes?

By Jove! he must not look at them too long! Even now Gwenda is turning to hand him his cup. But her words and smile are for her father.

Presently the captain and Geoffrey fall into a discussion which necessitates reference to a big chart, on which the captain traces with his pencil the position of sundry dangerous rocks and reefs, fatal to the unwary; and, while they are thus occupied, Gwenda disappears. By-and-by Nellie brings in biscuits and glasses, but her mistress does not return.

As ten o'clock strikes, Captain Chetwynd begins to wind up his watch.

'We keep early hours here, Mr. Langdale. I daresay you would like a cigar before turning in. You have choice of the porch with the inner door shut, or the kitchen for smoking-room—or, better still, a turn on the gravel outside. In fine weather that is decidedly preferable.'

'Yes, thanks. I shall enjoy a saunter outside, and early bed. This strong air

makes one appreciate the exemplary habits of our ancestors.'

'Well, good-night, my lad. Breakfast at nine—not too rigorous that, I hope? Good-night.'

Geoffrey took himself and his cigar to the cool regions outside, where he crunched the deep layer of dark-blue gravel back and forth; now passing round the silent blank of the gable, faced by the whitewashed wall of the mast-yard, now back again to the front—with a passing surmise as to which might be Gwenda's window of the two in which light was showing.

An unconscious feeling of pique possessed him when he thought of her; he would have scouted the idea angrily if it could have presented itself to him in tangible shape—but it was there.

The spoilt children of fortune resent indifference; it is as unpleasant a shock to the moral epidermis as a cold douche on a December morning. Good-looking and rich, too much flattered, too much sought after, he had come to accept women's regard as a matter of course, and a light thing, easily won, therefore not to be greatly valued. Even though he felt himself to be here on a sort of unspoken parole—this thought was pleasantly suggestive to his self-conceit—he did not care to have his sceptre turn into a wand of lath; to be obliged to confess himself harmless—worsted; a lion spurned by lambkins.

In his ill-humour he sought to recall some movement of Gwenda's, some trick of feature or speech that he might cavil at. To his astonishment the effort led

him into an unwilling concession to her of unusual graces and perfections.

'I hate frigid manners in a woman!' he asseverated angrily; yet, the moment after, was thinking she had the sweetest smile imaginable—the softest voice. 'But it is all for her father,' he added, discontentedly. 'She is so devoted to him that she has eyes for no one else.—Deuce take it!' he ejaculated, flinging away his cigar-end, and looking vaguely round him in the darkness, 'is there something catching in the very atmosphere of this extraordinary country, that three days of it make me ready to write sonnets to an eyebrow, and fall at the feet of the first passably good-looking young female I meet? I am decidedly deteriorating—getting impressionable in my old age.'

His patriarchal dignity rested on the

weight of six-and-twenty years; during which, indeed, he had managed to see a good deal, and had learned as much of the art of suppressing feeling in oneself, and disbelieving in its existence in others, as is considered properly necessary to the education of a man of fashion and the world.

But, occasionally, that troublesome organ, the heart, will assert itself. It beats a little now and then, and flutters, even after we have carefully battened it down and forgotten it. It thrills strangely at certain times, and shrinks and quivers at others—betraying reprehensible weakness of course in doing so, of which all properly-constituted minds should be ashamed. But we are advancing rapidly in the art of disposing of this troublesome appendage; in a few years, according to

correct theories of evolution, it will no longer form a part of our internal economy —discarded along with one or two other superfluous members as unnecessary incumbrances to our higher civilization.

Geoffrey, after going through the usual routine of college life—the wines and suppers—the steeplechases, and rows, and consequent hot water—the grand burst of excitement with the rival 'eights'—and lastly, the very disproportionate amount of learning acquired therewithal—'a halfpenny worth of bread to this intolerable deal of sack!'—found himself facing the problem,—an 'asses' bridge' to many,— 'what to do with his life?' It was open to him either to choose a profession, or take his natural place in the Langdale firm —a flourishing business, secured and made

stable by three generations of his name. For obvious reasons his father would have preferred the latter course, but, being rich enough to afford it, was content to let his son take his own time in coming to a decision. So, for a year or two, Geoffrey had been travelling in the company of another well-to-do college chum, and had come home pretty nearly as undecided as ever. Swiss mountaineering, and dawdles on Venetian balconies by moonlight; cigars among the fastnesses of Capri, or long cruises around Zante and Monte Christo; did not tend to enhance the charms of mercantile life. Yet he was unwilling to disappoint his father's long-cherished hopes.

Then it happened that, after the *Belle Tremayne* had been loaded and dispatched,

certain alterations in her sailing orders were found desirable, and Geoffrey, the idle man, readily accepted the commission tendered him. He was to intercept her at C——, if possible, and give the amended instructions to her captain. That Fate willed otherwise we know; he was never to look on the face of the captain of the *Belle Tremayne*—alive.

Geoffrey, having finished his cigar, goes inside, dutifully attending to bolts and bars;—unaware that as often as not the hall door stands invitingly open till morning. For no such monstrosity as a burglar had ever been heard of in that region within the memory of man; and, if there had, the reputation of the captain's valour, and amazing armory (as a

government man) of swords, pistols, and cutlasses, would have been sufficient to deter the boldest.

Geoffrey's room was lit up by a splendid turf fire, which was a novelty to him, and on the whole rather agreeable. He drew an easy-chair before it, and, lying back therein with folded arms, went over the records of the day dreamily. He and his friend had once been caught in a squall off Capri, and had to wrest the oars from the hands of the very men who spent their lives in daily battle with the elements, yet were now paralyzed by fear. He remembered the exultation with which they strained and fought with that angry white sea for every inch won towards land and life.

But he had seen to-day how brave, trained men carry themselves in danger's

front; their coolness and resource, and calm acceptance of what the venture may bring. And the rush of the great Atlantic! —the salt of its spray on his lips—how wildly exhilarating it was!—infinitely beyond all dallying on summer seas. Verily it is the element of the Vikings—the chosen retreat of Neptune himself! Only —it is apt to be cruel in its play.

Geoffrey thought of the spars and the cordage, and shreds of torn sails he had seen floating near those saw-shaped rocks; the few splintered boards, and the fragment of a boat with '*Belle Tremayne*' in white letters gleaming mockingly in the sun. That was all of her that was ever to meet mortal eye. And the captain and his men too were gone—out upon a wider sea, shoreless, fathomless, and silent.

Geoffrey shuddered and sat up. The

wind, never quiet here, plained at his window. He stirred the glowing turf into a blaze.

'Nice cheery stuff that is for a fire,' he observed. 'Amazingly early hours they keep in this house, to be sure, and yet—' here he found himself yawning. 'That strong sea-air must be a powerful soporific. Gwenda—Gwendolyn?—That name is Welsh. So is Chetwynd—or is it Cornish? But there's no mistake about her eyes! they are Irish—steely grey, almost black—and such lashes!—— Good heavens, I am dropping asleep! There *is* something peculiar in this air.'

CHAPTER III.

NOT A MERRY CHRISTMAS.

In spite of the wind, which roared and howled in the chimney like a score of newly escaped demons; tearing round the tower section of the house in which Geoffrey's room was situated; thundering at the windows with blows that threatened to burst them in with every fresh assault; he slept the unbroken, dreamless sleep of youth and fatigue, till a pale streak of wintry sunshine struck aslant into his room. Then he hastily consulted his watch, and found he had but a bare twenty minutes to dress in.

His window looked to the back; over stretches of field and hedge, towards which the long avenue led, with the plain stone pillars and gate showing grimly unadorned at the end.

Below in the yard he could hear Pat's step as he passed back and forward at his work.

On reaching the breakfast-room, Geoffrey found the captain attired in full naval uniform—a mark of respect for the day which he never failed to observe. And very well he looked in it, with his medal ribbons on his breast, and even the scar appearing to be quite a natural and indispensable accompaniment.

Gwenda, in giving her hand to Geoffrey, hoped that the noise of the wind had not disturbed him.

'*We* are so thoroughly used to it that I

think we should hardly be able to sleep at all in a more sheltered place. But I know it does annoy those who are not accustomed to it.'

'I cannot accuse the wind of disturbing me,' answered Geoffrey, laughing. 'No navvy could have slept sounder.'

'That's right, my lad, that's right!' said the captain. 'Do everything thoroughly when you're about it. I can tell you a fellow does not sleep by halves when he's only got a short watch to do it in—or less, mayhap, when Mother Carey's chickens are abroad. Well, we're all ready for church—will you join us?'

'With the greatest pleasure,' answered Geoffrey, 'but—where is your church?'

'Oh, our church has neither belfry, steeple, nor pulpit. We have service in the watch-house at Dirrel Cove. Some

two or three clergymen take it in turn to hold it, and as often as not do not put in an appearance; then I have to read prayers myself. But just now we are fortunate in having Mr. Wentworth with us for some months. He has had to give up active work, owing to ill-health; and finding the place suit him we strain a point in such a case, and allow him to lodge with Mrs. Coble.'

Gwenda laughed.

'Such a lodging as it is too! I know it is very wrong—but I often find my thoughts straying from the sermon to wonder how on earth sedate Mr. Wentworth manages to get up that ladder and into the room without irreparable loss of dignity!'

Her father shook his finger at her with a proper show of reproof.

'Then the room is visible from church?' said Geoffrey.

'Oh, yes—and I really wish it wasn't. Once that Mrs. Coble left the window open; a towel screen and several other properties were blown down through the open trap, right on to Ben Weatherley's head, who had been fast asleep, and, waking up suddenly, he shouted out something about "taking in all sail," and "a reg'lar squall," till the tittering of the boys brought him to his senses, and he rushed out, overwhelmed with remorse. He has never gone to sleep during service since then, however, and nothing would induce him to sit under that trap-door again.'

Geoffrey, looking at her animated face as she told this story,—always with mischievous, quick glances at her father,—thought he was only now beginning to see

Gwenda to advantage. Here was her real self: lively, mutinous, having that rare faculty in women, a ready perception of the ludicrous. The stately beauty of last night was beginning to thaw. Yet never had he felt before what he felt now—diffidence in addressing a woman.

They chatted pleasantly through breakfast. Nellie, fresh from morning chapel—a mile's walk—waited on them, looking like Hebe herself. When she left the room, the captain said,

'I heard young Paddeen getting soundly rated this morning by Peggie—what is his latest delinquency?'

'Poor Paddeen! He is always in hot water. It appears some "sports" on the road attracted him, so that he did not get back with the holly and ivy in proper time, and the servants had in consequence

to stay up till near morning working at their decorations.'

'Do they, then, try to rival this?' asked Geoffrey, looking at the pretty arrangement of greenery and scarlet on table and mantel-piece.

'Oh, these are very modest efforts. But putting up evergreens at Christmas seems with them almost a religious rite, so I leave it entirely to the servants. The kitchen is always like a bower on Christmas Day. We have not time now, but, if you care to see it in the afternoon, I shall be glad to show it you.'

'I shall be sure to remind you of the promise.'

And now the captain, looking at his watch, said,

'Come, my lass, it's time to get your bonnet on.'

So Gwenda went away to dress, coming back in a few minutes, very simply but tastefully attired—everything she wore looking fresh and delicate, and as if nothing could possibly have been so appropriate. Yet she wore nothing with the least pretensions to costliness.

The captain, before starting, tapped the barometer, and decided in favour of a walking-stick versus an umbrella thereupon. Then they went out by the front, not taking the field-path, which was accounted *infra dig.* on high occasions, but following the long bend of the avenue, and taking the road which wound in circular fashion downwards, till it ended in a sudden deep descent to the station.

The hoar frost sparkled in fairy lightness on every tiny leaf, and numberless

little cobwebs in the hedges flashed their diamond wheels in the sunshine. The breeze, too, was full of exhilarating freshness; it blew away their voices, obliging them to shout laughingly to each other at one moment, the next sinking to a deceitful and short-lived calm. It even whisked away Gwenda's veil, giving Geoffrey a lively chase after it, which necessitated the vaulting of turf-built walls, and careering at top speed over two fields, before coming back, breathless but triumphant, with the truant veil waved on high. He was able to give her deft assistance in fastening it on again, which was more than the captain could ever have done.

He had possessed himself of her prayer-book at starting. The captain had also considerately provided him with a 'ready-

reckoner' for his own particular use—but Gwenda fortunately discovered and rectified the mistake.

The long road stretched before them white and untravelled. No single figure was visible anywhere.

'Does no one go to church but ourselves?' Geoffrey asked, surprised at the solitude.

'Not many this way,' answered Gwenda. 'The Catholics have all been to chapel in the morning. Later in the day, some of the young men gather about "the Cross" and play games—golf, or shinty, of a sort. But there is little life among the people now.'

'It seems like having the whole world made over to you,' said Geoffrey. 'We are monarchs of all we survey, for the

present. Do you like living in this solitude?'

'Yes,' said Gwenda, 'it is probably a question of habit. I have had no other experience. But father, who *has* some acquaintance with it, tells me he does not like town life.'

'No, no,' said the captain. 'Give me a place where the winds of heaven reach you pure and unadulterated—not reeking with the soot and smoke of filthy chimneys, and the gin and garlic of civilization! Unadulterated!—by George! nothing is unadulterated that comes out of a city! Look at the stuff they call milk!—a cow would commit suicide at sight of it.'

'Yes—there is rather a pretty trade doing in wooden nutmegs of late.'

'I'll tell you what, sir,' said the captain, warming to the discussion, 'they want a regular taut hand over them, some of those fellows. By the Lord Harry! I would string every one of them up to the yard-arm that sold sand for sugar, and turned dead cats into sausages! But half-a-dozen would do—just make summary examples of half-a-dozen!'

'"Pour encourager les autres,"' laughed Geoffrey. 'I have not the smallest doubt it would have excellent effect.'

They were now at the head of the steps—if, indeed, they could so be called; for in reality they were mere uneven ledges, partly natural, partly rough-hewn in the sloping cliff. Geoffrey was watchful of Gwenda here, and begged her to let him take her hand, the captain having taken the lead. But she had known them since

childhood, these rocky stairs; every crack and crevice, with the bit half-way down that was always wet and slippery because of a spring of water that might have been of use somewhere else; and the crumbling bit at the foot that was generally a slough of mud. So Gwenda declined his assistance with thanks, and tripped down without fear or difficulty.

The seven whitewashed houses looked conscious of the day; there was a Sabbath stillness and propriety about them, with every door shut, and every window open the regulation two inches, that showed their proprietors were already gone to church.

Our party of three passed in through the open door of the watch-house, and the captain drew his daughter along very hurriedly. For in one corner a large sail

was spread, and he would not have her notice it.

They went through a passage, at the end of which an open door led into a room of very moderate proportions, which was now packed closely with common school-forms. And on these were already seated the coastguard men, with their wives and families.

The captain led the way to a side bench, which was his usual seat; having at his back the store-cupboard, from which a fine tarry and turpentiny odour emanated. Facing the congregation was a raised desk, which did duty as pulpit and reading-desk.

The men were all in their trimmest Sunday get up. On the window-shelves were piled broad-brimmed, glazed hats, along with the black cloth caps of the

boys. Street, with his wife and family of nine, took up the whole of one row. Behind him sat Edson and Weatherley, and Mr. and Mrs. Coble. Park was a Roman Catholic, and 'in another place.' Bradley, as chief boatman, enjoyed the honour of a corner seat—not quite so enviable a position as might at first sight appear; the whitewash from the wall coming off on his coat, and giving him the appearance of a miller who had left the scene of his labours too hurriedly.

Geoffrey noted the ladder and the open trap as described by Gwenda, and wondered whether the clergyman was expected to make his entry from thence.

But his doubts on this point were set at rest by Mr. Wentworth's appearing at the door, attired in his surplice, and threading his way through the rows of seats to his

place behind the desk. He was a mild-looking man with gold spectacles, and a far-away look as if he had never been able to account for his own presence anywhere, and was still busy on the problem. But he was much liked and respected; and well he might be, for his ear was open to every tale of woe, and his slender means at the disposal of the unfortunate. He was learned in antiquarian lore, and apt to forget times and places and seasons, and the various necessary obligations of a degenerate modern life.

A very simple, quiet, and earnest service it was. Wanting, indeed, the pomps of surpliced choir and black-robed officials; of groined roofs and gilded lecterns, and windows throwing splashes of crimson light like blood over peaceful, up-turned faces. It wanted the gleam of

marble tablets, full of praises that the shade of the dead man might blush to read—if that inconvenient process could be compassed by a shade—and the incense, and intoning, and correct Gregorian gabble—all these.

And it wanted, too, the insincerity, the sectarian bitterness, the lip-service and pharisaical display; the learned disputations on points of doctrine—well understanded doubtless of the Priest and the Levite, not of the poor Samaritan.

But methinks the promise of One, who walked in Galilee two thousand years ago, has better likelihood of realization here, after all: 'Where two or three are gathered together in My name——'

The responses were made with a fine, rolling depth of manly sound, and it was startling—when you were not used to it—

to hear the captain pray devoutly for King George, and the whole of his exemplary family; which mistake he made on some twenty-six Sundays out of the fifty-two—the result of a too-faithful adherence to the text of his prayer-book, which was the gift of his godfather on his first going to sea.

With eye-glasses in hand, or resting on the bridge of his nose, he followed the clergyman through thick and thin. Indeed, poor Mr. Wentworth—who was asthmatic and subject to breathlessness—found his assistance so convenient that, at times, when the captain's lungs were getting full play, he left it all with him while he took a little surreptitious rest.

But the captain's glasses had a way of dropping off at critical times, and the captain himself, when suddenly unable to

find his place, had a queer knack of continuing the sense in language of his own —to the entire satisfaction of his nautical hearers, and the bewilderment of the less initiated.

I doubt if the teeming congregation in your grandest cathedral can show as much earnest reverence and devotion as was evident among these few simple tars.

At the prayers, every man drew from his pocket a folded handkerchief, bright red, or still more brilliant orange, and spread it on the ground, whereon to kneel. The children—mostly Streets—were kept awake by the aid of peppermint lozenges, lumps of bread, and shakings.

But they were wide awake during the singing. The psalms—good old Tate and Brady—were not to be lightly heard nor

soon forgotten. Street had the reputation—long standing—of being musical; of being an undoubted authority on music; and of having—a voice!

That anyone who had sat through a service in that room, with its complement of two chants and two psalms, would have ventured to deny it, was simply impossible. It was stentorian in its calibre. It rang through the rafters; it vibrated among the galley-pots on the shelf; it awoke echoes in Mr. Wentworth's room overhead.

It *was* a voice! As Coble remarked unfailingly every Sunday as they sat down to their 'bit o' beef an' greens,' 'it's a woice, Mary Ann, as should have made his fortin'.'

It goes without saying, therefore, that

Street's problematical sacrifice of fame and fortune on the altar of patriotism invested him with a reverential halo akin to martyrdom in the eyes of his fellows. He had absolutely refused to be anything but a British tar; he had resisted the blandishments of wildly importunate impresarios—at least, he was prepared to do so if they had ever happened to hear his voice—and was satisfied to accept only the modest homage of the appreciative few in quiet Dirrel Cove!

So it came to pass that the psalmody resolved into Street—and only Street. The other men gradually retired, unwilling to spoil Street's magnificent efforts, and, though each possessing, in a moderate degree, 'a bit of a voice'—were content to chirp mildly in the background while

the captain beat time on his book with his glasses, and said to himself that Street was doing well—very well indeed.

Gwenda was fain to bite her lip at times. To-day she dared not look near Geoffrey, whose eyes she was sure to meet. Opposite them were Mary Connell and her aunt. She envied them their grave absorption; Mary sang with quiet fervour, regardless of all others. Gwenda could not do this; she had to stop in dismay now and again.

It was a relief when the musical part of the services was over.

When Mr. Wentworth retired, and returned in his black gown, every man folded his hands between his knees, and looked fixedly on the floor, or up at the rafters, while he gave out his text and began his sermon.

It was an unusually solemn one to-day. There was not a heart there untouched as he spoke of the tragedy that had just been enacted in their sight—of the perils of the deep, and the uncertainty of our hold on this frail shell on earth. An old, old text!—but always true, always the better of being emphasized. Many eyes were wet, many strong heads bowed, while the good man spoke with weak and faltering voice.

Gwenda sat beside her father, pale and still, seldom lifting her eyes from her clasped hands. The captain nodded his head, and murmured audible assents at particular points which struck him forcibly.

When the benediction was given, they all filed out, subdued and quiet, while the captain remained in conversation with Bradley.

Gwenda, as usual, looked in on Mrs. Coble, who was standing in all the glory of a black velvet bonnet and long-fingered gloves at her room door, and dropping her usual curtseys.

'Ah, Miss Chetwynd, ma'am, it's a solemn Christmas for us all, this! True it is for Mr. Wentworth that them winds an' them waves is warning voices. Never a wink o' sleep did I get myself last night for listenin' to 'em.'

'Oh, Mrs. Coble—Mr. Wentworth spoke of a woman and child—the bodies were washed in last night, he says.'

'Ay, indeed, miss, so they were. An' lookin' that sweet, poor lambs, as if they was sleepin' on beds o' down, instead o' bein' washed like wisps o' weed here an' there in the salt sea. They were found quite close to one another, miss, as though

the poor mother held on to her child to the last. Come this way, miss, and just look at the poor things.'

Gwenda hung back a moment, and shivered. She had never seen death, and had the great awe of it natural to the young.

But another feeling seemed to prompt her while she stood there, hesitating and fearful. Suddenly she moved forward with set lips, and stood beside the old woman as she lifted up the corner of the sail.

Five bodies lay under it, but Mrs. Coble only disclosed three. They were the captain of the ship, his wife and child, a little boy about five years old. They all had that look of peaceful repose so strangely peculiar to the drowned. The boy's golden curls were mingled with the dark, wet locks of the mother. Whatever they

had been in life, they were sanctified now with the calm, rigid beauty of death.

For a moment Gwenda trembled, and drew closer to Mrs. Coble; there was something so new and terrible in the marble stillness of each white face.

There is a feeling, in looking at the dead, of expectation—a dread of their making some sudden movement, and the thought that, if they did so, the shock would drive one crazy. Why is it that the dear form that represented all of sweetness earth could hold for us till now should take on something sinister in its spiritless condition—the poor chrysalis abandoned of its tenant?

Doubtless Gwenda felt this nameless dread. But better feelings still gained the mastery, and she drew near, and stood looking down on them in silence, the tears

gathering slowly, and trembling on her lashes.

This was the end! For that strong father, that gentle-faced wife, that poor little child for whom life was only beginning to open out its wonders. Here, under this rude covering laid over them by stranger hands—dank with the slimy embraces of heavy sea-wrack that clung and held them in its ropy arms, when the great waves, tired of their playthings, would fain have cast them ashore—they rested side by side, their days of storm and sunshine alike over. No breath of summer wind would ever again ruffle those sunny locks, or touch the pale lips of that sleeping mother. This was Death!

As Gwenda's head drooped, the petals of some flowers she wore touched her cheek. They were white chrysanthemums,

put on that morning to please her father. She pulled the blossoms hastily from the brooch that held them, and laid some first on the breast of the woman, the rest on that of the child, her tears dropping softly the while.

Mrs. Coble looked on with folded hands, nodding approval. Gwenda turned away with a grief-stricken movement of her hands, and saw her father standing in the doorway—Geoffrey too behind.

'My dear, my dear,' said the captain, 'I did not wish you to see this.'

'Oh, father, I *ought* to see it—I, who am so safe and happy! It is right—oh, it is right that I should!'

She could hardly speak, yet struggled to be brave. The captain, much disturbed, drew his daughter's hand through his arm and led her outside, while Geoffrey re-

mained. Mrs. Coble, with the peculiar interest that elderly females take in corpses—perhaps enhanced in the case of violent and untimely deaths—was ready to exhibit her poor charges as if they were waxworks, and she herself Madame Tussaud.

Geoffrey had seen Gwenda's hands lay their loving tribute on the poor lonely dead; he too looked long and silently on them.

When he left, Mrs. Coble was loud in her praises of the consideration and care evident in his directions for the decent hiding away of the poor remains.

'Even to the puttin' up of a head-stone, an' a man from Clonmacross to be sent out to do it,' she informed her husband for the third time during his enjoyment of some excellent plum-duff—a sailor's Christmas pudding.

Geoffrey, when he reached the upper road, saw the captain and his daughter walking slowly on in front. He hung back a little, wishing to give Gwenda time to recover from her shock. But in a few minutes they turned, and were evidently waiting for him, so he quickened his pace.

The captain was taking a pleased survey of the prospect.

'I'll tell you what it is,' he said, emphatically, 'there's nothing I know of anywhere to beat the beauty of those cliffs and that ring of sea on such a day as this! The sun absolutely burnishes their edges, and they seem to fling back his light over the water. Look at those puffins and cormorants—each one like a statue on his pedestal.'

'It *is* magnificent!' said Geoffrey. 'Your

coast here is infinitely grander than anything England can show. There is a savage wildness about it; a continual strife between sea and land that no descriptions I have ever read in the least prepared me for. How the daily and hourly contact with such forces should make men as gods compared with the wretched denizens of cities!'

Standing, with the wind blowing his hair back from his forehead, his eyes roved over the blue waste of waters with admiration.

'What a time those old Vikings must have had of it! What a grand, free life!'

'Ay, ay,' said the captain, 'pleasant enough when you're going trim and taut, straight before the wind, heading for port. But there *are* days when goloshes and an umbrella won't keep you dry.'

Geoffrey laughed at the captain's practical views, and turned to Gwenda.

'I hope *you* sympathize a little with my enthusiasm, Miss Chetwynd?'

'Yes,' said Gwenda, 'I love the sea—when I can forget how cruel it is.'

'Do you like sailing?'

'Very much. The greatest treat father can give me is to take me with him to Black Point, when he goes to visit the station.'

Geoffrey wished he had his yacht here. Even on the strength of his short visit he thought of sending for it.

When they had reached the house, and were sitting at luncheon, the captain insisted on Geoffrey's tasting some of his favourite Christmas cake.

'This sort of cake—they call it barreen here—is an amazing weakness of my

father's,' said Gwenda, smiling. 'But he is so loyal to times and seasons that he will not let me make him one except at Christmas—though I sometimes make a cake that is very like it under a different name.'

'"A rose by any other name,"' quoted the captain, sentimentally, making fine play with his third slice.

The cake was undeniably good; but, on hearing that Gwenda herself had made it, Geoffrey was more than ready to endorse the captain's judgment.

'Hope you've not forgotten the little Streets,' the captain paused to observe.

'Peggie took a very big one to them this morning.'

'That's right, that's right! Lord, what a jubilation we'd have had in our midshipman's mess if some good Samaritan

had thought of presenting us with one of these on a Christmas morning!'

'Father, you ought to be a middy yet. You're as great a boy as ever,' said Gwenda, laughing.

'Come, come, miss! no disrespect on the quarter deck! Turn to and make another barreen to-morrow—this one is nearly finished, and—Mr. Langdale likes it.'

The mendacity of this assertion set his auditors laughing. But Geoffrey corroborated it with fervour, and Gwenda promised to gratify them both.

'May I remind you too of your promise to show me the kitchen? I am anxious to take every opportunity of enlightening myself as to the manners of the country.'

'Certainly, if you care. Peggie will be highly flattered, I know.'

Gwenda led her guest through the

double doors to the kitchen, where Peggie, resplendent in holiday attire, was carefully attending to the basting of the turkey, with an anxious eye on the pot in which the plum-pudding was steaming like a young whale. Ladle in hand, she performed the orthodox dips, while Gwenda explained the object of their visit.

'It's kindly welcome ye are, sor. An I'm sorry that the green isn't quite so fine this year, bekase o' the birds eatin' all the berries,—an' that spalpeen Paddeen comin' home so late.'

But all this was mere pretence of modesty; for in her heart she knew that their efforts were never more successful. The kitchen was a perfect grove of evergreens—holly and ivy most conspicuous. The bright tins gleamed out of the dark, berry-decked leaves; tall brass candle-

sticks on the high mantel-piece were wreathed with them; the dresser, with its rows of shining plates and bowls, had bunches stuck about it plentifully. On the table was a Brobdingnag candle, also encircled with bristly leaves; the Christmas candle; a most essential part of the festivities.

Peggie, overawed by the presence of 'the grand gintleman,' stood as far back as possible, and bobbed curtseys on being spoken to.

Geoffrey gladdened her heart by giving the decorations unstinted praise. It was indeed a pretty little kitchen, made all the more picturesque by a red-tiled floor, and a wide chimney with an old-fashioned grate, in which the invariable turf blazed merrily. Nothing so new-fangled as a range had yet reached that quarter.

When they came back to the dining-room, they found the captain in ordinary dress, prepared to go down to the station.

'Now, my lad,' he said, 'I've settled with Bradley to have a try at the wreck. You'd better not go in church-clothes, though. There's a goodish bit of sea on yet, and we'll probably get a sprinkling before we're back.'

Which Geoffrey discovered by-and-by to be rather a mild way of putting it.

CHAPTER IV.

CLOVERNOOK.

It was necessary that the captain should make up the arrears in his 'log' before going down to the wreck next day.

'It doesn't do to let it get ahead of me,' he explained. 'I am a poor hand at a stern chase of that sort. Take a turn round, my lad, and at eleven o'clock I'm at your service.'

Accordingly, Geoffrey sauntered away, cigar in mouth, to explore the Cross; while the captain set to work with his red

ink and his black, his quills, and sand-box and rulers.

Geoffrey, having satisfied himself that an Irish hamlet was the most unsightly and depressing collection of dwellings to be found anywhere within the ken of civilization—or out of it, for that matter—was slowly returning up the avenue, when, on approaching the house, he found it beleaguered. Outside the white wall of the stable-yard, miserable old crones sat, their skinny hands holding round them the tattered remains of black cloaks, their bleared eyes seeing nothing, patient expectancy only expressed in their motionless attitudes and utter silence. One or two haggard mothers with infants, and small boys in charge of cans and pails big enough to have held themselves, made up the array. Eyes, hollowed by fever and

starvation, were hardly lifted as he passed; but one or two, feebly mindful yet of courtesy, murmured, 'God save ye, sir,' and drooped their heads again.

Geoffrey, glancing into the stable-yard, saw Gwenda, swathed in brown holland, busy ladling out soup from a boiler with Peggie's assistance, and he caught the sound of her voice as she put kindly questions to the poor applicants.

'Good heavens, what an active life that girl leads!' he thought. 'Why, she does more in a day than I believe I do myself in a month—and all for others!'

Moreover, thank fortune! she had nothing of the conventional goody young lady about her; she did not bore one with tracts and views; she could take rational interest in the pleasant things of life, while ministering to its sorrows.

Musing in this wise as he passed on to the front, he was met by the captain, hatless, with a letter in his hand.

'Pat!—Pat ahoy! Hang the fellow! where's he got to? Pat ahoy——!'

If Pat had been dead and buried, the captain's shout might have wakened him; it was fit to bring down the walls of Jericho. But the only effect was to draw Coble out of his stone bower, where he had been spelling over last week's paper.

'I rayther think Pat's in the hay-loft, sir,' said Coble, touching his hat.

'In the hay-loft? What the deuce is he doing there?'

But just then the captain caught sight of an end of the dismal phalanx at the back, and burst into a roar of Olympian laughter.

'Oh, by George, of course! It's one of

Gwenda's soup-days, and the poltroon has such a mortal terror of "the fever" that, when these poor wretches come about the house, he goes aloft there, and burrows in the straw till the last one has gone. Here, Coble, find the idiot, and tell him to harness the gig and overtake Norah, if he can, with this letter. If he cannot catch up with her, he must go on with it to Clonmacross.—Now, Mr. Langdale, I'm your man. It looks like business to-day. And, if we don't get that cotton stuff in pretty soon, it won't be worth the carting away. Have you instructions what to do with it?'

'In a general way to make the best we can of anything saved. The whole thing is next door to a total loss, of course. What is the usual mode of procedure in these cases?'

'Oh, we have a sort of auction on the shore—sell the stuff for anything 'twill fetch. Had a ship loaded with cocoa-nuts and Jamaica wares last winter—went to pieces just as yours did, on the Swords. Sold the cocoa-nuts by wheel-barrow measure, and the whole population were ill with indigestion for a month.'

Geoffrey's face expressed unqualified distaste of this proceeding. His own impulse would have been to let the sea keep its spoils rather than go through this sordid ordeal.

The captain saw the struggle with amusement.

'Come, come, my lad,' he said, 'pocket your pride for a while. You're not in Langdale's counting-house now, but on a desert island, and your business is—like Robinson Crusoe—to rescue what

flotsam and jetsam you can from the wreck.'

Geoffrey had to confess that his prejudices were unbusiness-like. And he ruefully doubted the possibility of his ever acquiring sufficient of the commercial spirit to make such transactions bearable to him.

They succeeded in saving a boat-load or two of the bales that day. But, as evening drew on, there were again signs of rough weather. It had come on to blow, and white horses were rising, far out, on the darkening surface of the sea.

Next morning was too stormy to allow of their working at the wreck. They were taking it easy at breakfast—idle perforce, through stress of weather—when Nellie appeared with a bouquet of hot-house

flowers and a note, which she handed to her mistress.

'Oh,' cried Gwenda, 'Connie Standish must be back! No one else has such hot-house flowers; what beauties they are!'

While the bouquet was being admired, Gwenda opened her note, which enclosed a card.

'They ask us to dine with them to-morrow. This card is for you, Mr. Langdale. Mr. Standish hopes you will excuse informality and a short invitation, and come with us. Here is Connie's note, father.'

'Hum,' said the captain, skimming it over, 'positively couldn't stay away another day in such splendid hunting weather—Aunt Mansfield's duller and more severely proper than ever—hear you have been having the excitement of a wreck,

&c., &c. Well, Mr. Langdale, you'll come, I hope? Standish is an excellent fellow; you're sure to like him. He's got a harmless craze for geology, or some sort of 'ology—and is, I believe, writing a book about the connection of the moon with the flood, which he expects to revolutionize all pre-conceived theories on this subject. I can vouch for his being a capital hand at a game of chess—but you have to keep taut hold of the string and haul him down from the moon now and again.'

Geoffrey expressed his pleasure in accepting the invitation, and Gwenda went at once to answer the note, as the messenger was waiting.

As this was to be a *dies non* as far as the wreck was concerned, Geoffrey had visions of being permitted to dally a little in 'my lady's bower'—perhaps to try his powers

of captivation a little, and find out whether it was pride or prejudice—coldness or coquetry—that made Gwenda so unapproachable as yet. He had to confess himself puzzled as to her character. That she possessed that most precious of all charms to fickle humanity—infinite variety—he perceived at first sight. At their earliest meeting he had thought her manner queenly; her eighteen years might have been thirty, for any lack there was of womanly dignity and ease.

But again she was a merry, laughing girl, child-like almost in her pretty, teasing ways. But these were all reserved for her father; the quips and cranks, and really clever badinage—all for him. To Geoffrey she was gentle, courteous—and cold.

He had given over trying to persuade himself that she was dull-witted. No, that

count might be laid aside. It was not inanity that lay behind that Diana-like curve of the lips—yes, of course it was the Diana of the chase she reminded him of! She had the same exquisitely-shaped head—the most perfect woman's head in the world,—with rippling hair, so different from any artificial crimpings or curlings.

As he thought all this, he was sitting at his window, folding and sealing letters for the post. Chancing to raise his eyes, he saw Gwenda moving swiftly down the avenue, and with a sudden impulse he rose, intending to follow her—but as quickly sat down again.

He remained leaning on his elbow, chin on hand, at the window. He watched her till she had gone through the gate and out of sight. And even then he did not

change his attitude—in his mind's eye he still saw the proud head and graceful shoulders—he wondered which road she had taken, and in fancy followed her in her rapid movements.

Presently a different figure loomed in sight. For a while, without speculation, he lazily noted it—then the peculiarity of the thing struck him. It seemed to be a moving mass of basket and cloak at first; then he discovered that there was a woman under it, and it dawned upon him that she was the medium whereby his letters were to be conveyed. He finished the sealing of them, and carried them down to the table in the hall, where the captain's correspondence was already lying.

Having to make the best of his own

company, he went into the drawing-room, where Gwenda's work and books were lying about, and, taking up her Tennyson, passed his lonely hours in reading it.

On the following evening, Geoffrey, as he would himself have expressed it, 'donned his war-paint' in good time, and, going down to the same little sitting-room, threw himself on the sofa, with 'Bentley's Magazine' as a solace, till the others should appear.

Not very long was it, however, before he heard the soft rustle of Gwenda's approach.

She came in, gloves and shawl in hand.

'You are exemplary, Mr. Langdale! I imagined myself first in the field.'

Geoffrey had risen, as she entered, and was now standing near her as she drew

the china bowl filled with flowers towards her.

'I want some flowers for my dress, and they are all so beautiful I do not know which to choose. Can you undertake to advise me?'

It was the first time he had seen her in conventional evening-dress. The soft white drapery made her look still more girlish and sylph-like; it was the simplest of dresses, yet she could not have looked more lovely in cloth of gold.

'May I?' said Geoffrey. 'I should like to choose you something fitting, if you will trust me.'

His eyes went from her to the flowers, and back again. Then he drew out a cluster of creamy white lilies, fragrant, delicate things, and offered them to her. Anything more brilliant would have

seemed to him a coarse profanation of that faultless white robe.

Gwenda smiled.

'Yes,' she said, 'I like your choice.'

'Wait a moment,' said Geoffrey; 'they are wet, and would spoil your dress. Let me cut off some of the stem.'

With his penknife he cut away the wet ends, and she turned to the mirror to fasten them in her dress.

'There,' she said, gaily, turning round that he might see the effect, 'you have really rather good taste, Mr. Langdale. What a pity it is, though, to take the poor things from their only chance of life! They are sure to wither in an hour or two.'

'Will you give me them when they do?' he asked, impulsively.

But Gwenda had turned to greet her father, whose step sounded at the door.

'Ah, father! you the last to be ready! What an amount of pains you must have taken with that tie and collar!'

'Deuce take the collar!' growled the captain. 'Peggie has starched the button-holes out of it. And, now that it *is* fastened, I feel like a donkey in a horse's winkers.'

'I have been making myself gorgeous with flowers. Won't you have one in your button-hole, daddy?'

'Oh, you have nothing there that would suit *my* complexion. Let me look at you.'

As his daughter stood laughingly before him, Geoffrey wondered if Reynolds himself could do justice to that vision of young loveliness; the graceful head held

back in merry sportiveness; the tender bloom of the cheek, and creamy whiteness of the neck, against which the lilies were resting.

That her father was proudly satisfied was visible in his eyes. 'Ship-shape, all taut and trim, my lass. You'll do very well, I think—oh, yes, very well indeed!'

'And now,' he asked, 'how are we going to travel? Do you want the gig?'

'Oh, no, father. That would mean leaving me to Pat's tender mercies as a driver. Let us walk. It's quite a fine night.'

'Well, be sure you wrap up well, then. You and I had better get into our coats, Mr. Langdale, for we have old-fashioned prejudices in favour of punctuality hereabouts, where dinner is concerned.'

Gwenda joined them in a few moments,

carefully pinned up and cloaked by Nellie's deft hands.

'Now, got all your loose tackle?—handkerchiefs, and fans, and things?'

'I don't mean to load myself with much superfluous gear,' Gwenda said, laughing; 'but I think I have left my gloves in the drawing-room.'

Of course Geoffrey forestalled her movement, and hastened to get them.

There they were, the dainty little things, with their white fluffy trimming, lying on the table where she had left them.

Geoffrey caught them up, and—oh, tell it not in Gath!—pressed them quickly to his lips.

Then smiling at himself in cynical mockery—as if he were looking on at the absurdities of some one else—this Achilles, who was beginning to feel darkly doubtful

of his invulnerability, thrust the gloves into his breast, and hurried after the others, who had walked outside.

'Would you like a lantern?' the captain asked, with sailor-like concession to a woman's probable fears and fancies.

'What, daddy, to put out the eyes of the stars? Oh, no: Besides, the delight of going out in the dark is always the best part of an entertainment to me, when I know I am well protected. But when Pat is seeing me home we make arrant cowards of each other. He sees bogies in every bush, and of course I see them too.'

'Well protected.' The words sounded very sweet to Geoffrey's ear, and involuntarily he moved nearer to her as she took her father's arm. Then they started off, crunching the deep gravel, and bringing

Boatswain out of his bed to wag them a sleepy good-night.

Their way to Clovernook was down a steep hill, an extremely sudden descent, which brought them at once to the level road leading sea-wards, a good deal to the east of Dirrel Cove.

There was no moon, but the suspicion of frost made the stars look, as a child once said, 'like pin-holes in the sky to let heaven's glory through.' Gwenda made her father find her the pole-star, and she and Geoffrey tried to trace the fanciful shapes of the constellations. There was a strange, spell-like stillness in the air that made their voices startling, even to themselves. They felt like interlopers, breaking in upon the solemn hush of night. The least sound seemed to reach far out

into space; their very footsteps rang sharply, and woke echoes.

They walked at a quick pace, and soon the deep bark of a dog was heard.

'Ah, that's Rolla!' said Gwenda. 'He's a splendid fellow, but an utter fraud as a watch-dog. He would welcome a whole army of burglars with effusion, and show them the way into the house.'

They had now reached a small gate which led directly from the road into what appeared to be the stable-yard of a long, low house, quasi-Elizabethan in its style.

'This is not the proper entrance,' said the captain, 'but it saves us a round of more than half-a-mile. Hullo, Rolla, my hearty, how goes it?'

A splendid Newfoundland dog was giving them boisterous welcome, and hospitably

marshalling them towards the house, where the butler, an ancient servitor of saturnine aspect but staunch principles, relieved the gentlemen of their coats, while Gwenda went upstairs in charge of a trim maid.

While waiting, Geoffrey had time to notice that the hall was hung with a curious medley of modern trophies of the chase, intermixed with rare fossils; heads of extinct lizards of the antediluvian, saucer-eyed period amicably hob-nobbing with a fox's head and brush; mammoth tusks crowning a stand of hunting-crops and walking-sticks.

The house was long and low, all the sitting rooms being on one floor; and it had a look of age and long possession in wealthy hands. In the recesses of the latticed windows cushioned seats were

placed, and half-drawn curtains added a look of inviting comfort to their cozy depths.

The dark oak staircase seemed to stretch upwards to a gallery where the bed-rooms were situated. Below, a red baize door, closely studded with brass nails, lent additional comfort to the dining-room; opposite that was the drawing-room. Quaint battle-pieces were placed at intervals on the staircase; the smoke and red fire were conspicuous in the mellow light of a hanging lamp.

As if the only thing wanting to complete the picture, Gwenda presently appeared, coming slowly down the stairs, as she fastened her gloves. To the two men standing below, the white, slim figure looked very sweet against the dark back-

ground of the wainscot. One, at least, breathed quicker at the sight.

Entering the drawing-room, they found the Connells already arrived. They were warmly received by their host and his daughter, and, introductions over, Geoffrey was presently sitting by Miss Standish, whose conversation was of the extremely lively, slightly slangy description; and, as she appeared used to doing all the running in that direction, Geoffrey was well content to have it so, merely holding his own where it seemed called for. She was decidedly pretty; fair-haired, blue-eyed, and red-lipped. It was a style of beauty that might readily fascinate—of which one might as quickly tire.

Geoffrey, listening with sufficient show of interest, took the opportunity of making

himself acquainted with the outward and visible personalities of his fellow-guests. The elder Miss Connell struck him as intelligent-looking and amiable; Mary plain but good; a girl who expected little of life, yet who herself gave much.

His host was evidently a man of refinement and reading; somewhat *too* bookish and 'up in the clouds,' as the captain had hinted. A young cousin, Mr. Arthur Maitland, was hardly worth classifying at all; he was a boy, newly emancipated from round jacket and turnover collars, to the ineffable paradise of swallow tails and 'stuck ups.' He was in a perpetual effervescing condition, like cheap champagne.

Presently a new field for Geoffrey's speculations presented itself. Mr. Lawrence Darcy was announced. And an un-

doubtedly handsome young fellow entered the room.

Miss Standish left her sentence unfinished, and rose at once to meet him. The colour had deepened on her cheek as she held out her hand.

And he, taking it, was looking straight across the room, while he answered his hostess's quick remarks and questions in slightly distrait fashion. They drew forward to the fire, and Geoffrey took the opportunity of vacating his place, and moving towards the corner where Gwenda and Mary Connell were sitting. Gwenda had turned her face away from the room, and was looking towards the window close to which they sat. Geoffrey availed himself of a vacant chair, and was archly appealed to by Mary for his opinion on a question of rose culture which Gwenda

and she had been discussing. While they were laughing over the startling and original treatment he was prompt to suggest, dinner was announced by the solemn-visaged butler, and Geoffrey found himself paired off with Mary Connell. When they were seated at table they discovered Gwenda opposite, with Darcy on one hand and the lively cousin on the other.

Mary Connell proved a pleasant companion, natural, easy, and well-informed. Her smile was very sweet, and lighted up an otherwise plain face till one was disposed to discard the first impression as being too hastily formed, and call her pretty.

The conversation, however, where all seemed old acquaintances, was disposed to be general.

It struck Geoffrey as strange that be-

tween Gwenda and Darcy there appeared to be something of constraint and formality. Their remarks were few and disjointed; yet, while Gwenda chatted freely to the boy on her right, Darcy never appeared to lose a word from her lips; his eyes were turned to catch her lightest movement.

'You are all very old friends here to-night, are you not?' Geoffrey asked of his neighbour.

'Yes,' answered Mary. 'We have played together, we younger ones, since we were babies. And the old people are still longer friends.'

'Hard hit, I think,' was Geoffrey's inward comment, as he watched Darcy. The dainty dish he had just helped himself to lost savour within the moment; he was seized with a burning desire to find the

key of the puzzle. Gwenda's manner gave him no clue to it. Did she care for Darcy, then? And—was he afraid, or had he already tempted Fortune—and lost?

Just then Miss Standish claimed Darcy's attention.

'What were the hunting prospects, and what had the Faugh-a-Ballagh been doing in her absence?'

In occasional pauses the elder Miss Connell's pleasant voice and laugh were mingled with the deep, jovial tones of the captain, and Mr. Standish's remarks upon new works and theories he had come across in his late meetings with scientific cronies.

When the ladies had withdrawn, Geoffrey, in the re-arranging of seats, found himself accidentally placed beside Darcy, and, in the natural course of things, ex-

changing with him the ordinary common-places of conversation. But the ball was allowed to come to a standstill from luke-warmness on both sides; Darcy was too evidently pre-occupied and moody, and Geoffrey was well content to be relieved from the burden of keeping up the mere semblance of conversation where neither was interested. The elder men were loudly discussing some one of the vital questions of the day, and their excitement made sufficient cover for the unsociably inclined.

Darcy, letting his untasted glass stand before him, leaned his chin on his hand, while he piled nutshells into shaky towers that might have represented the unstable nature of many fair hopes, so ruthlessly did they come crashing down, for all the pains he bestowed on them.

Once, as his eyes met Langdale's, there

was a strange look in them—like the sudden up-leaping of a smouldering fire—a look half-questioning, half-menacing. Only for an instant. Then, leaning back in his chair with folded arms, he lapsed again into moody reverie.

When they adjourned to the drawing-room, Mary Connell was seated at the piano, with Gwenda standing beside her. She was playing some of Beethoven's sonatas. Not often was there to be found in those days an amateur who could render such music worthily. Mary was a notable exception. For the moment the spirit of the composer seemed to have entered into her; earth and its surroundings were no longer near; her whole soul was steeped in the grand flow of the sounds she evoked.

The murmur of applause when she had finished was genuine and hearty.

Presently Mr. Standish approached Gwenda.

'Now, Miss Chetwynd,' he said, 'you know what I am coming for. Let me have my favourite old ballad once again.'

Gwenda smiled, but hesitated.

'Dear Mr. Standish,' she said, 'you who reverence Beethoven would not surely insult his hovering shade with "The Maid of Islington"?'

'My dear, though I admire the rose, it is no reason I should deny beauty to the daisy.'

Geoffrey, overhearing the request, joined in the petition; though he had, in general, a rooted antipathy to all amateur performances. His feeling during the infliction,

was usually one of savage helplessness; a sullen submission to unprovoked torture. But, contrary to his principles, he now pressed Gwenda to sing; some instinct told him that, if she essayed to do it at all, she would do it well, though he was not prepared for the sweet surprise that those first notes gave him. The young, fresh voice thrilled through him; it carried with it suggestions of all things lovely and pure and tranquil. So the wood-nymphs might have sung by moonlight, in hollows chequered by the whispering leaves; so carolled maids of Arcady, weaving wind-flowers and marsh-mallows in their hair.

It is but a poor sign of the times we live in, that with the dawn of the most natural and human of all our emotions—love—we turn instinctively to the haunts

and the days of the great god Pan; back from two thousand years of enlightened scepticism to the truth as the Pagans knew it; back to the broad breast of mother Nature, in her youth and freshness.

Oh, Science, fiery Destroyer, sweeping through space with thy comet-tail! When thou hast drawn down the third part of the stars from heaven shall we rejoice—shall we sing pæans in thy name?

Geoffrey thus was betraying dominant symptoms of his condition. Gwenda's voice seemed to carry him far away into dewy depths of summer night; he thought of the joy of floating with her on some moon-lit stream, while she sang quaint, old-world ballads full of pathos and passion—even as she sang this now. As he listened, it made his heart throb and his breath come quick.

That her voice was untrained was true enough—better so, a thousand times, with the freshness of the morning in its bird-like tones. And, underlying this, all a woman's delicate feeling and expression.

When the song was ended, there was a moment of hushed quiet. A tear glistened in Miss Connell's faded eye. Fain would Geoffrey have asked for more; but the irrepressible cousin, who had been waiting on tenter-hooks, now rushed up, full of a great purpose.

'We're going to have a spin; Connie says we may! Here, some of you fellows, help to dispose of this rubbish.'

The rubbish referred to consisted of several tables and stands, full of rare Indian carvings, antiques, and china, which he proceeded to rattle away into corners with more celerity than reverence.

'Now, we'll turn all the spare chairs into the hall, pull up the rugs, and there we are!'

Geoffrey, having assisted at this summary disposal of Mr. Standish's property, was returning to the room with the intention of securing Gwenda's hand for a dance, when he perceived that Darcy had forestalled him. Geoffrey saw him approach Gwenda, and, bending down, say a few hurried, eager words. He noticed, too, that the colour deepened slightly under Gwenda's downcast lashes, and for a second or two she seemed to hesitate. Then silently she accepted Darcy's arm.

Connie Standish had already started a galop with her cousin, who was understood to be hopelessly, madly, in love with her —when he could spare a moment or two

from his collars. Geoffrey, therefore, shaped his course for Mary Connell. He really liked this girl; there was a wholesome unaffectedness about her manner that was refreshing; and her unbounded love and admiration for Gwenda, utterly free from what might be considered a pardonable pang of envy, was perhaps a further recommendation to Geoffrey's esteem. Her aunt, though no proficient, was a very satisfactory player of dance-music, and had taken her place at the piano as if used to the office.

In the course of conversation, Geoffrey remarked that Gwenda's singing was a delightful surprise to him; she had not given him the least inkling of her having talent in that direction.

'I could have been sure of that,' answered Mary, laughing. 'Gwenda will not

be persuaded that her singing is worth listening to, though, as you saw to-night, she will not refuse to gratify any of us who really seem to care for it. For my part, I think it has a charm of its own entirely different from that produced by teaching—it reminds one of the "hidden brook in the leafy month of June," full of dreamy rest and sweetness.'

'It is exquisite,' said Geoffrey, feeling that Mary's words had expressed exactly what was floating in his mind.

When the galop was over, after a few minutes' interval a waltz was started: neither the deuxtemps, nor its later rather jerky substitute, but the original German waltz—a smooth, graceful movement, beginning slow, and gradually quickening towards the end. The perfection of playing for this dance lay in the power of

making the gradations of time almost imperceptible.

Geoffrey was prompt to seize the chance of engaging Gwenda this time. Darcy was leading off with his hostess, and the 'irrepressible' was bestowing his fascinations on Mary Connell.

They glided off together. As Geoffrey put his arm round her, as he felt the lithe form sway with his in sympathetic movement, something new and strange thrilled to his heart's core: the knowledge that now, within this brief moment, he held in the circle of his arms the sweetest, fairest thing life had yet revealed to him. The cynical carelessness that had clung to him like an unsightly garment was falling away insensibly; never did any woman's voice have power to move him—as hers did: never had he believed it possible that to

hold her thus to his heart, to feel her light hand on his shoulder, her hair touch his lips, would be to him worth all he had experienced, though sated with the sunshine of women's smiles, their coquetries and flattery!

Gwenda moved as all exquisitely moulded, graceful things *must* move; she might have been a feather, a star of thistledown, so lightly she floated beside him. Gradually the music grew quicker; yet a little closer Geoffrey's arm drew her, faster—still faster—till they were circling wildly, and Gwenda felt herself lifted off her feet, and grew dizzy.

As the last strains of the music died away, they were out in the dimly-lighted hall, and Geoffrey was leading her to a cushioned seat in a window at the extreme end.

She felt faint and giddy—yet she was used to waltzing. She let her head sink back against the wainscot, and Geoffrey stood in front; both were silent.

The slightly heightened colour in her cheek intensified the dark curve of the lashes that seemed powerless to rise and meet the fervour of admiration in his eyes.

For some moments they hardly knew that they were silent. Then Geoffrey drew in his breath like one waking from sleep.

'How thoughtless I have been to let you go on so long without resting!' he said. 'I fear I forgot everything but the wish not to lose one bar of that exquisite waltz!'

There was a hand-screen lying near, and, lifting it, he took his place at her

side and began to fan her gently with it.

By degrees Gwenda emancipated herself from the unaccountable thraldom of shyness that oppressed her. What was this stranger to her that she should feel embarrassed under his gaze? She had tired herself to death in that long waltz—she wished she had not danced it—she wished she had not come here to-night—that it was time to go home——

'Oh, folly!' Then she nerved herself to bear her part with dignity, and turned calmly towards Geoffrey, who, talking light nothings, had been watching the downcast lids as he fanned her.

'See,' he said, pointing through the diamond lattice, 'how exquisite the garden looks by moonlight.'

The quaint old yew arches were throw-

ing deep, mysterious shadows over the grass. The long spikes of hollyhock showed spectre-like in quiet corners—bloomless relics of summer.

'It is indeed a delightful old garden,' said Gwenda; 'and, when the thermometer is not quite so low as it is at present, we often go there after a dance.'

Geoffrey looked out thoughtfully. It was an ideal pleasaunce to wander in—side by side with the chosen of one's heart. And then his brows knit. Had Gwenda walked there—through those dreamful shadows—with Darcy at her side?

Gwenda had no prescience of the angry gleam. The moonlight was shining softly into her eyes as she looked up.

'The night only wanted this to make it perfect,' she said, watching the snow-

tipped crescent. 'Diana has come into her court.'

'Diana!' murmured Geoffrey. 'Do you happen to know the statue of Diana with the fawn?'

'Yes.'

'What would you say if I told you that sitting there, with your head turned just so, you are strangely like it?'

'I would say, Mr. Langdale, that you were curious to know how much flattery I could accept with complaisance. *Don't* say it.'

'Well, then, I withdraw—as they do in parliament after the murder's out. But I may think it.'

Her eyes were still turned towards the scene outside.

'If I were disposed to envy Connie

Standish anything,' she said, musingly, 'it would be the possession of such a garden. You know we cannot grow anything up at the Tower. Not a tree or shrub will stand the fierce sea wind. But for her good-nature, I should seldom see a flower.'

The association of ideas made her glance at the flowers in her dress. Alack, they were not recognisable! They had lost all semblance to the things of beauty placed there a few short hours ago.

'Oh, my poor flowers!' Gwenda cried.

And then, remembering how they had been crushed, the colour rose into her cheek as she unfastened the clasp that held them. She was about to toss them into the fire a few paces off; but Geoffrey, who had followed her movements with a jealous eye, caught her hand.

'Forgive me,' he said, 'but let me keep

them, as a remembrance—of to-night!'

To free her hand she let them go.

'They are only fit to throw away,' she said, with as much indifference as she could muster.

But he still held them, and thrust them into his breast as Gwenda rose.

'I am quite rested now, thank you, Mr. Langdale. Let us return to the others.'

Geoffrey offered his arm, and they went back—out of moonlight and dreams—into lamplight and reality.

After this there was a polka, for which Geoffrey had Connie for partner, and was unaware that he pledged himself emphatically to her dictum that it was the only dance at all worth moving in—that a waltz was a poor, shuffling, spiritless thing compared to it—etc.

And all the time he was living over

again the fleeting minutes of that waltz he wondered if he should ever know the like of again.

And then the library-door opened, and the captain's voice was heard in shocked accents, proclaiming it was past midnight, 'and a pretty time o' night for staid folks to be kept out of their beds.'

Good-nights were said all round, and they were presently out again in the star-light, with the moon, now high, throwing deep shadows across the road from every gnarled thorn and gate-post.

'Sleepy—eh, my pet?' asked the captain, giving his daughter's arm a little squeeze—'tired, eh?'

For Gwenda and Geoffrey were inclined to be silent.

CHAPTER V.

THE HAND OF FATE.

The flitting shadows of passing birds made swift light and shade on Geoffrey's face as he lay next morning between sleeping and waking, living over again in dreams the sweetness of one short half-hour.

As he lay with hands clasped under his head, lazily tracing the cracks in the ceiling, the haunting melody of that old-time waltz kept sounding in his ears, a little hand was fluttering on his shoulder, a shell-like ear was near his lips. It was

very sweet to lie and dream of it, but——

Once again, what did the captain mean by that look—that suggestion that he was to be as much as possible his own father? Did he object to *anyone's* coming and ruffling the serene quiet in which his daughter's young life was passed? Nay, he was surely not selfish enough for that. Or did he in particular object to him, Geoffrey Langdale? Again, why should he, knowing neither good nor evil of him?

But there was a more common-sense explanation lying midway between the two, which Geoffrey, but a short week ago, would have been quick to see—so rapidly was he acquiring the desirable qualities of modesty and humility, the hand-maids of true love. The captain had no will that his daughter should receive attentions from

any gay Lothario who might choose to simulate love *pour passer le temps.* With all his sea-going innocence of the world and its worldliness, the old sailor knew that the heart of a girl was a delicate thing; a frail and tender blossom, not to be rudely touched by careless hands. This it was which made him hesitate, and submit uneasily to Geoffrey's presence.

Yet as the days went on, and Gwenda and their guest saw but little of each other, his doubts began to fade, and he allowed himself to be lulled into the comfortable security fathers are prone to entertain in such cases.

And Gwenda? What were her thoughts at this self-same hour?

She had risen early, notwithstanding her last night's dissipation, and was sitting by the window in her wicker-chair—

dreaming. Shapeless dreams they were, altogether retrospective. There is this difference between the dreams of a man and a woman. He—grasping, eager, like Oliver Twist, still 'asks for more;' she—catching and storing her happiness, as the evening sky holds the golden glory of the vanished sun, can live long on the memory of yesterday's sweets, contented.

And yet, as her eyes turned thoughtfully to the blue waste of sea and sky outside, there was a shadow in them that was new; a vague disquietude that her own spirit failed to interpret.

Gwenda seemed to have two natures—or at least the salient characteristics of two nationalities. All the quickness of emotion; the passion of enthusiasm and faith; the self-abnegation that carries a

true woman to death and martyrdom for the cause, or the man, she loves—all these belonged to her Irish ancestry, and came to her with her Irish eyes, with the laughter and the tears that were hidden together in them, like sun and shower on an April day. But keeping these in check was a proud reserve—gentle withal—that belonged more to her father's side of the house; and it was not less of a charm than the other. For a woman's heart is like the wild rose—sweeter, far better worth the winning, for its fence of thorns.

And it was these two natures which were at variance now. One was bidding her gather the blossoms of fancy, and dream sweet dreams, and listen to the magic music in her heart. The other, more prosaic, more severe, taunted her

with a too-ready yielding to the weak promptings of vanity—the moon-sick follies of a school-girl.

And, as a woman invariably does in such cases, she accepted the disagreeable, without question, as the path of duty. She took herself to task for having, even unwittingly, wavered from the calm, somewhat cold, bearing she had judged it fitting to assume towards Geoffrey, and then and there resolved not to give way again, by so much as a hair's-breadth, in that commendable attitude.

Consequently, when they met at breakfast, there was no tremor in the hand which touched Geoffrey's, no consciousness in the calm, sweet eyes.

And for him, in a moment, the dreams of the night and the morning had faded like their own mists. He was certain of

nothing but that he was a conceited fool, and that the sooner he packed his valise and departed, the better for his peace and self-respect.

Nor was his equanimity at all restored a little later, when, while waiting for the captain, he stood, taking Pat's sapient opinion of the weather while he lighted his cigar. For a figure on horseback was seen approaching, and Pat broke off with a jubilant,

'Oh, thin, here's the gintleman comin' that's goin' to marry Miss Gwendy! It's Misther Darcy, good luck to him!' And, as Geoffrey strode off in silence, a triumphant grin stole over Pat's Milesian features, 'Faith, I think I've put a spoke in *his* wheel anyhow. What business has an Englisher comin' here an' gettin' inside o' wan o' the good ould stock?'

The two men passed each other on the avenue—with all the outward and visible politeness and inward volcanic rage peculiar to rivals for the same woman's love.

If Geoffrey had condescended to look back, he might have saved himself part at least of his chagrin. For Darcy did not go into the house, did not ask for Gwenda, but merely handed Pat a packet with which he had been entrusted in passing Clovernook, and departed quickly as he came. The packet contained Gwenda's tiny pearl brooch, which had been found on the floor of the hall.

At luncheon Gwenda was informed that their guest must leave immediately. He had already explained to the captain that 'business with the agents' required his presence without delay at C——. A vague

statement, which was, however, quite sufficient to impress the innocent mind of his host with the belief that the prosperity of the firm of Langdale's might be seriously endangered were the summons not instantly attended to. The gig and Pat were accordingly placed at his service.

'But, so soon as calm weather sets in, we must have you back. You know we hope to get at the hull and the anchors then. And, by the way, Mr. Wentworth leaves early in February. Now, there is his room at your service—on the spot, too.'

'Yes,' answered Geoffrey, vaguely doubting the likelihood of that room's being occupied by anyone, if it were not Langdale's head clerk—an estimable and long-trusted individual, warranted proof against

a whole battery of Irish eyes, being already the happy possessor of a strong-minded wife and family of nine. 'Yes, that would answer capitally.'

And now adieux were being said. Geoffrey allowed himself to hold Gwenda's hand just a second or two longer than was necessary, as he searched her eyes for any faint token of regret. But what a woman has made up her mind to hide, she will hide—and 'there's an end on't.'

And so he went away, having made the inconvenient discovery, during that apparently uneventful week, that he possessed a heart—and that it ached.

There are certain spaces in our lives which, on looking back upon them, seem all blank. We know we must have eaten, and slept, and gone back and forth in

them, in the usual daily round of life. But they have no records. Like the long hours of a moonless night, there is nothing to mark their passing; and we feel uncertain when at last the dawn comes whether years might not have been lost in them—so formless, dull, and unreal is the impression left on the mind's retina.

Something like this Gwenda felt, yet chafed against, in that long dreary month of January, while the mists rolled up from the sea, and rain sobbed and beat on the window-panes, and moaning winds plained sadly round the house at night.

She was angry at the secret unrest that possessed her. Her proud spirit refused to formulate it in words—nay, even in thought. She hid from herself the bitter possibility that a voice and a step were the notes missing from the full chord of

her life's music. She felt the sweetness lacking in it, yet she hated to acknowledge the want.

Who has not realized it? The wretchedness of inaction for the one left behind—the envy of his easier load who has change and movement at least to break the dreary blankness of the day?

But Gwenda was no craven. No unsought love should find shelter in her heart. And she threw herself with double energy into the rendering of the many duties that melancholy period called for.

On the night of the party at Clovernook, Darcy had taken mute farewell of his dreams. With the jealous quickness of a hopeless passion, he had noted Geoffrey's admiration for Gwenda, which he knew was as certain to ripen into love as

dawn into day. For her sake he tried not to hate him. Dying wretches upon the battle-field, with the dew of agony beading their pallid brows, have had the cup snatched from their lips by stronger hands, and died cursing them. God mend us all!

One day, when wind and sky 'proclaimed a hunting morning,' Lawrence and Connie Standish were as usual foremost in the run. They had always been the two boldest riders in the field; Lawrence indeed carried his reputation to the verge of recklessness, and was not less deserving of it of late. They had kept close together from the start, and the pace from the first was inclined to be furious, the scent lying well, and the hounds in full cry in front.

They had crossed a long grass field sprinkled with heath, and were now nearing a well-known fence that no other members of the hunt ever dreamt of tackling—a high bank of furze, beyond which lay a deep ditch—the most treacherous trap imaginable for anyone unacquainted with its bearings.

But Darcy knew it well—so did Beelzebub his horse. Connie too had been over it more times than she could count, and now followed Darcy straight for the gap, with perfect confidence in her steed and in herself.

But, at the very moment when Lawrence's horse rose to the jump, an elfin head shot up like a 'jack in the box,' out of the furze with a wild whoop. The startled animal swerved, going over in a huddled heap, sideways. Lawrence had

time to fling himself outwards, clear of the body of the horse as it fell crashing into the ditch below. But a blow from its foreleg laid him senseless and bleeding.

Connie, with a wild effort, had managed to stop her horse from following, and, turning him downwards, rode to the gate, where, throwing herself off headlong, she rushed into the next field, and up again to the scene of the accident. Her heart beat thick and fast as she drew near and saw no movement but the wild struggles of the horse.

As she got to the side of the ditch, her eyes fell at once on Darcy's white face, and the thin red stream that trickled from his temple; and she staggered blindly, her breath coming in gasps that nearly suffocated her. But perception of his imminent danger helped her to combat physical

weakness. The horse, in his efforts to rise, threatened every moment to be the death of his master. Connie came close to him, and with white lips tried to speak soothingly to the poor beast, that was plainly more frightened than hurt. And for the moment it quieted him.

She cast a despairing glance round for help. But the whole hunt had gone by the lower route. Far away in the sun-light, out of reach of the strongest voice, their red coats were gleaming, and the bay of the dogs, and huntsman's shout, came to her mockingly on the breeze.

And even as she looked all about her, praying for aid, she was speaking to the horse, as well as her trembling lips would serve her.

Then, in agonies lest it should move and

crush the helpless head, she knelt down, and, catching Lawrence by the shoulders, tried to draw him upwards.

Oh, the dead weight of insensibility! She shuddered as the thought struck her —was it death itself? Oh, merciful heaven! — not that, not that! Her strength seemed going from her in the supreme moment of her need.

Yet once again, with all the energy despair and terror could give her, she threw herself back, and managed by slow, scarce perceptible stages, to draw Lawrence's head and shoulders a little to one side. Yet more and more she worked, strength seeming to grow with success, until he lay on the brink, and she had dragged him along the level of it, so as to be entirely out of possible danger from

the horse. And it would seem that the poor animal only waited for this, for, with a toss and a scramble he got footing at last, and, climbing out, trotted off delightedly.

Connie, kneeling at Darcy's side, felt more and more the terrible certainty creeping over her that he was dead. She flung back the clustering hair that the wind was blowing across her face. But it was with tears that her eyes were actually blinded; they were running down her cheeks, while her sobs came unrestrainedly.

And it was on this picture that Darcy's gaze rested as he woke to tardy consciousness. She was so utterly despairing, and lost in her grief, that for a moment she was unaware of the change. Her clasped hands were laid across her eyes in the

moment that he opened his. As she looked again, and saw the life in his face, a glow of colour flashed up to her brow, and she caught his nerveless hand in hers, unconscious of the tears that were streaming from her eyes.

'Not dead! Oh, thank God, not dead!' was all she had power to say.

Darcy drew a long breath, as he lay silent, watching her.

'Oh, speak!' she cried, 'say you are not much hurt after all! I thought—I thought—you were *dead!*'

She let his hand go and stood up, struggling with her sobs.

'What has happened?' he asked, dazedly. 'I've come a cropper, I know—but what was the reason?'

'That wretched idiot—Murty—startled your horse just as he was taking the jump.

You fell with him into the ditch,'—she shuddered—'and I think he must have struck you and given you that horrid cut on the temple.'

Lawrence raised himself on his elbow.

'But how on earth did I get here?' he asked, looking at the gap, where the torn furze-roots hung in the fresh red earth.

'I—I had to drag you away. The horse was struggling so he would have killed you.'

Again Darcy's eyes sought hers.

'Connie,' he said, 'you have saved my life;' and he held out his hand.

To give him hers, she had to come again and kneel by his side. And he took it, and held it in silence.

When they rode home together, through

the wintry twilight, they were plighted to each other—plighted to share together life's good and ill—its laughter and its tears—till death should them part.

CHAPTER VI.

WOO'D AN' MARRIED AN' A'.

The news of their engagement did not take long in spreading.

If 'happy's the wooing that's not long a' doing,' there must have been many happy marriages in those days. Once the sweet consent had been given, there was no long, tiresome probation in which the lovers are kept hanging, like Mahomet's coffin, between heaven and earth, but with the comforts of neither. Once they had

agreed to take each other for better for worse, there was no shivering on the brink —they shut their eyes and plunged bravely in. And, whether the douche proved too hot or too cold, they made no worse faces over it than we do.

It wanted but a few days of her wedding when Connie Standish was sitting in a cottage that stood midway between Clovernook and Kilcoran. Why a house should have been built at all in the place it occupied would have puzzled anyone but an Irishman to explain. Probably its original projector would have told you, 'it had no advantage at all—barrin' its inconvaniance.' Behind which mysterious utterance some truth might lie. At any rate, its 'inconvaniance' proved convenient enough when smuggling was the only trade a

gentleman could embark in who really respected himself.

The house stood among clumps and banks of overgrown furze, rising one behind the other on a stretch of useless, untilled land which reached for near a mile straight down to the sea. There was no approach to it, save by a lightly worn path, from the open road. And the house, at a little distance, with its weedy thatch, was not easily distinguished amid the furze clumps which surrounded it.

An utterly lonely place it was, full of the sound and the salt air of the sea, and at night haunted with weird cries of passing birds, and prowling things that seek their food in darkness. And, its owner's reputation not being of the canniest, few ever darkened the low-set door from one year's end to another.

Its owner was an old woman who had in her young days, been nurse to Connie's mother, and who, after leaving that peaceful service, had encountered more than her share of life's vicissitudes. Her husband had been killed in a struggle with 'government men,' her son 'had left his country for his country's good,'—the outcome of an unhappy difference of opinion as to the ownership of a sheep. She cherished a bitter enmity against the laws that had brought about these calamities, and would at any time cheerfully have assisted at the drowning of a gauger or choking of a 'Peeler,' without disturbance of conscience. She was now established as laundress (outdoor) to the Standish family. Poor as her surroundings were, she kept her small house scrupulously clean, and no linen anywhere was more snowily pure than

what she bleached on the heathy ground, and ironed on her rickety deal table.

Connie was in the habit of visiting her for her mother's sake, who had till her death retained an affection for the old servitor not uncommon in such cases in Ireland. But, as Connie came into the cottage to-day, she noticed an angry gleam in the old woman's eye, instead of the usual kindly welcome, and she puffed at her pipe silently for some moments before answering her visitor's inquiries as to her health and comfort.

'Och, thin, what else would I be but sick an' sore! What is there in the worrld for the like o' me but the bitther dhrop to dhrink, an' the black ashes betune our lips from daylight to darkness for ivermore? Ayeh!'

'But, Becky, you know you are ever so

much better than you were last Christmas, for all your grumbling. And don't be cranky now, for I want you to wish me luck.'

'Luck is it, thin?—Oh, blessed saints above! An' doesn't yerself know, Miss Connie, that it wud blisther the tongue in my mouth to wish luck to chick or child, or stick or stone, belongin' to Philip Darcy. It's bad cess to the whole breed ov 'em is my prayer, from night till mornin'. Och, my darlin' boy!—the light o' my eyes, an' the pulse o' my heart—sint away over the salt says to his death by Phil Darcy!'

'Oh, Becky, Mr. Darcy had no more to do with it than any other magistrate. He couldn't help it a bit, indeed.'

'Ayeh! didn't he send him up to the

'sizes? An' they took him away from me, my brave boy—an' now they tell me he's dead, an' I'll never see him in the light o' the blessed sun again—wirasthru—wirasthru!'

With her elbow on her knees, she rocked herself back and forth, her chin resting on her hands, in a passion of sullen grief.

''Twas in Phil Darcy's sarvice that his father got his death—niver a thought nor a word did I get from him since my Jim was brought in to me cowld and stiff! An' 'twas Phil Darcy that could ha' saved my fair-haired boy from the clutches o' them that wor afther him. But the heart in him was cowld—oh, cowld as I pray his own hearth-stone may be before he dies!'

Connie shuddered.

'Becky, Becky,' she cried, the tears in her eyes, 'if I didn't know that it was all a mistake, it would terrify me to hear you talk like that. It is very cruel of you, when I had hoped to get nothing but good wishes from *you* of all people. But, for all that, I am sure—oh, I know!—that I'm going to be happy!'

The old woman ceased her rocking and moaning, and something of softness stole over her face.

'My purty darlint! Thim's the self-same words that my own Miss Connie said to me, whin she tould me that same story, twinty an' more years ago. Musha, they all think it, they all think it. But I wouldn't wish yerself anythin' but happiness, my jewel—sure, ye know that,' she

cried, passionately. 'May no sickness or sorrow touch ye, as long as the blessed saints are above!'

'You cannot wish one of us good, and the other harm,' cried Constance. 'What hurts him will hurt me, remember!'

Again the fire gleamed in the old woman's eyes.

'An' ye believe ye can thrust him!' she cried. 'Him—that only a month ago was killin' himself for the bare sight o' the English captain's daughther, up there on the hill.'

A dark flush mounted to the girl's brow and as quickly retreated, leaving her white to the lips.

'How dare you make such an assertion?' she gasped. 'You know—you know—it is not true.'

But Becky saw that her shaft had told.

'I don't believe it—because, hating them as you confess you do, you would say anything—anything—to do a Darcy harm!'

The old woman sat silent—her skinny hands clutching and working.

'Maybe,' she said at last, 'that I shouldn't say it. Oh, Miss Connie, don't I love ye to the core o' my heart, gramachree! An' sure it's because I don't know the man livin' that I would think fit for the likes o' ye, that I'm hard. An' there isn't a dhrop o' blood in my heart but I would shed for ye, for all ye call me wicked an' cranky!'

Connie was mollified.

'I oughtn't to mind you, Becky,' she said, more gently, 'for of course I know

all you have suffered, and how dark your life has become. And you believe—they are to blame for it?'

She held out her hand as she rose, and the old woman took it and pressed it to her lips, murmuring prayers and blessings in Irish, as she gazed at the girl fondly.

'If it was only anyone else—in all the wide worrld—but a Darcy!' she cried, throwing her hands above her head, as Connie's light step sped away over the desolate heath.

The girl walked fast, regardless of trailing briars and gnarled roots that seemed maliciously bent on hindering her. Had that one infinitesimal drop of poison reached her heart? Was it lying there dormant—to work, who knows when, unerring, deadly mischief?

But Lawrence was waiting for her when she reached home, with a miniature portrait of himself she had begged him to get her. And the annoyance of the morning faded away like mists before the sun as she softly kissed the little oval, and laid it beside a crisp lock of gold-brown hair in her cabinet of treasures, upstairs.

Connie's only trouble had been the leaving her father. She saw nothing more cheerful before him than the permanent establishment of Aunt Maitland at Clovernook—and she pitied him with all her heart.

But one morning the matter arranged itself, in the strange way in which chance takes us in hand occasionally. For Mr. Standish received a letter of more than ordinary length and interest, from one of his brother

savants. And, having read it, he spread it out on his knee like a napkin and thought.

'I don't see—really I don't—why I shouldn't go myself!' was the result of five minutes' absorption.

'Go—where, father? What have you got there?' his daughter asked.

'A letter, my dear, from Dormer. You know Dormer?—the greatest living authority we have upon fossils. And he says he and Groper and Jelliwig have just arranged an expedition to the most remote of the Pacific Islands—a splendid thing it *will* be for science, without a doubt—and he most good-naturedly offers to take notes for me himself for the book I am busy on. But, bless my soul, Dormer take notes for me!—Dormer, whose views on the subject of the moon's attraction are utterly erroneous, utterly opposed to

mine! Why, starting on such egregiously wrong premises, he would make every observation fit in with his own theories from beginning to end! Of course he would, it's only natural. No, no, Dormer couldn't take notes for me. But he also says'—Mr. Standish read from the letter—'"we want, if possible, to find a fourth, capable of taking scientific interest in the details of our work. How I wish *you* had been free to come!" Now, my dear, I *am* free to go. There is nothing to keep me from doing so, now.'

'Oh, father,' cried Connie, with tears in her eyes, 'would you go to those horrid cannibal islands and be eaten up by savages, as they did Captain Cook?'

'Pooh, my dear, there are no cannibals now—worth mentioning. And if they *did* eat Captain Cook they put up a handsome

monument to his memory, which shows they had qualms of conscience—or indigestion ; he *was* a tough customer.'

After the first blush, the idea did not seem at all a bad one ; and Mr. Standish lost no time in informing his friend Dormer that he was ready to join the heroic band, who were busily laying in sacks of blue beads and penny looking-glasses to propitiate the beauty and fashion of Wanky Fum, their first calling-place.

Many a man mistakes gratitude for love, or thinks it will do very well as a substitute. Lawrence did not stop to think—he had indeed rather avoided thinking since the day of his engagement—whether the conditions on each side were not cruelly disproportioned. What had he to give in exchange for the love and trust of a girl's

heart? Only the poor shell of one, filled with the still smouldering ashes of a hopeless passion. What was he?—whatever the fates might make him. A cloud blown before the wind, a straw upon the waves, the flash of a meteor in the sky, might represent a mission and a purpose better than he.

Old Phil Darcy watched him from under his bushy brows. He was shrewd enough to see that, as the stick was balanced, a breath might send it over, and he forbore to whistle. But jubilation was in his heart, and all he longed for was to see the day come that would put an end to uncertainty, and give Kilcoran a mistress with two thousand a-year and expectancies.

And come it did, as every day does; the day of the hearse, and the mutes, and the

sexton, as well as the day of kid-gloved knocker, and pin-cushions, and caudle;—and midway—equally set between smiles and tears—the day of the wedding.

'Till death us do part!'

Under the rose flush of cathedral windows; mid the sheen of satin and glow of pearls; with the perfume and beauty of flowers, and the light of girlish loveliness and laughter, and the hand-clasps and congratulations, and swell of music, and peals of merry bells—it falls upon the ear—it clings to the memory—like the sound of the first cold clod upon the coffin. The sigh of the brooding Shadow has swept through the aisles. We hear it plainer than the roll of organ and clash of bells. Ah, heaven! *that* day too will come! when one of us will sit by a still white couch,

and ask no more of sun, or moon, or night, or day than to give us merciful quietus—the swift, silent sleep that knows no waking!

'Till death us do part!'

The silken knot has been tied. Its rosy ribbons flutter sweetly as we pass out into the flower-strewed path. How long will they take to turn into galling cords that fret the quivering flesh—into chains that clank and drag with every movement, till the sick and tired soul welcomes the waiting Shadow, and blesses him as he severs the hated links—at last!

CHAPTER VII.

THE ETIQUETTE OF HADES.

JANUARY is a dreary month—the dreariest of the year. For by that time everything has become thoroughly soddened and saturated by the chill mists of winter. The summer is so far behind us we have forgotten how sweet it was; so far in front we scarce know how to hope for it.

Time has been, perhaps, for some of us, when, through all the year, we could keep the sunshine and the singing birds hidden away in our hearts. Oh, happy time and

glorious privilege! These halcyon days are brief as the rose's bloom—sweet as its heart—rare as the song of the swan.

Gwenda tried bravely to ignore the sense of blankness that had come into her life. She chafed impatiently at her childish feeling of unrest and weariness. Had she not as much in her day's round to think of and to occupy her as ever? Her books and her pencil, as well as all the constant efforts towards ameliorating the misery of the poor people for whom that dreary winter seemed an eternity of suffering and gloom? Yet at times she found it impossible to sit still, at book or work, at the mercy of tantalizing, bitter-sweet memories.

It was no marvel, in good sooth, that a life such as hers, monotonously quiet—calm as a rock-bound lake—should have

been moved to its depths as there flashed into it that strange, swift gleam of a light too new and startling to bring with it any feeling but disquiet.

She was angry with herself—yet would not to herself acknowledge a cause.

The revelation had been made to her of that subtle magnetism that draws soul to soul—inexplicably sometimes even to ourselves. Who shall exactly define wherein the magic lies that makes him throw his heart at the feet of one woman out of a thousand others as admittedly lovely, and bless her even when she sets her foot upon it in careless disdain?

It is one of the great mysteries of our nature—this erratic working of the sweet, blind god. And let it be. If life were laid out in squares with all the accuracy of a chess-board—if every move were care-

fully weighed and regulated for us, and no mistakes or false steps possible—the result would perhaps be highly edifying to the lookers-on—but the game for us would *not* be worth the candle. The gambling element is inherent in man. I am confident that Adam and Eve played at 'odd or even' with filberts in Paradise.

But never once—not in remotest fashion—had Gwenda thought of Geoffrey in the possible light of a lover. She looked upon him as something outside the radius of her life—of other interests, other aims and ambitions. But none the less his coming had brought a bright change and charm into her days that she could not forget; his going left them leaden and blank. Like a wing-shorn insect they crawled, where once they had flown in light.

It puzzled her to account for all this.

How little she had actually seen of him; how little she really knew of the light and the darkness—the angel and demon—that war in the heart of the best of us; and of what essences—ethereal or otherwise—this spirit was composed, that had power thus to draw her own—helpless and unwilling—to itself. How careful she had been to keep the bars of her stately reserve always between them. And yet, like incense escaping from a censer, the subtle aroma of a new joy was already faintly stealing into the empty cloisters, the quiet, cool recesses of her heart; a joy that, even as it was tasted, turned to bitterness on the lips.

Darcy's marriage had been a great surprise to Gwenda, though not in the least did any wounded vanity prompt the feeling. But she could not forget his looks

and tones—his too evident sincerity in the passionate pleadings she had so lately listened to—to feel satisfied that all was as it should be, and that Connie, poor girl, was getting anything like real affection in return for the blind devotion she proudly gave.

But that he was not here now—that he had at last, with his own hand, put the seal to his renunciation of Gwenda—was a relief to her beyond expression. She was thankful that her lonely hours could no longer be harassed by appeals that tore at her heart, and that now—why, she would not allow herself to think—would have been more than ever distasteful and unwelcome.

Sometimes at night, when her father read or dozed, she would throw a shawl over her head, and go out into the star-

light, mounting the look-out steps to the top, and here let the winds lift her hair and cool her brow, unconsciously seeking and receiving sympathy from the great heart of nature—from the calm, brooding stars, and the sad voice of the sea. It was so still there, so remote from all sound or sign of the world's movement, with the darkness shutting her in, and only heaven's great eyes awake. Not even the deck of a ship at sea could be more utterly isolated and lonely.

Work at the wreck went on but slowly. All the month was stormy; and even on into February there was little change. The cottons and muslins that were flung in by the waves were collected and sold for what they would fetch; and the farmers' wives and servants dressed them-

selves in 'wrack' accordingly; and Nellie went proudly to her morning devotions attired in green and white muslin that had been destined for the adornment of more dusky charms.

One day Gwenda had gone to her quiet eyrie on the top of the steps, and was leaning, chin on hand, on the wall, listlessly watching the distant ships, while her neglected book lay fluttering its pages at her side. The restlessness that was in her made her look at the white-sailed phantoms longingly. Oh, how happy they were who stood on their decks, and were free to go out into the great world, who could leave behind them all the dulness and inaction, all the wearing littlenesses of life!

Ah, short-sighted fallacies of youth!

For, let him fly on the wings of the wind, a man must needs take *himself* with him, go where he will.

Sometimes the long black line from the funnel of an ocean liner would cross the silvery plain. The great vessel had its own particular stateliness and beauty. It passed the white winged things as though they were mere nautilus barks drifting aimlessly on summer seas; it sped away over the western horizon while they lay like swans asleep in the sun. Long after it was a mere black speck, hardly visible to the straining eye, that dusky line lay as if it were ruled across the fairness of the picture.

Gwenda noted it all dreamily. But into her musings there broke of a sudden—borne on the wind—the distant sound of the funeral *keene*—that most weirdly mel-

ancholy and despairing cry, or rather chant, unforgettable, if once heard. It rises and falls in minor cadences, now high and shrill, now falling into a low, sobbing wail, not unlike the plainings of the wind on wintry nights, when storm is threatening. It has been the province of the older women, from time immemorial, to fulfil this function; and, as there are degrees of excellence in everything, there are some of those who have gained so high a reputation in this vocation as to keep them in constant request—their services even receiving pecuniary reward.

On the road which crossed at right angles with the avenue, there was, within sight of the Tower, an old graveyard to which, in the course of time, the mortal remains of every man, woman, and child on all that country-side seemed destined

to be carried. It was the only burial-place nearer than Clonmacross; and, during the late spell of famine and disease, its resources were severely taxed.

It was so old that tradition for once was at fault, and silent upon its history. But no one doubted that it stood there, just as it did now, when Irish kerns went about in yellow blankets fastened with wooden skewers—when Irish wolves, as Shakespeare tells us, 'bayed the moon,' and the snakes and toads were still comfortably enjoying their lodgings among the shamrocks. Long before Sir Walter Raleigh had presented Ireland with its first potato—what on earth did Irishmen live upon at that time?—before good Queen Bess, and Oliver Cromwell, and William, the stern and silent, had each tried her—or his—hand at civilizing them

with the help of howitzer and mortar,—and did not succeed quite so well as was expected.

In its midst a few crumbling stones remained to attest that once an abbey or church stood there, but no one knew or cared to speculate what denomination it had belonged to, or whether St. Patrick himself may not have preached in it.

The graveyard overhung the road, and the only means of getting into it was by the aid of rude unshapen stones which were built out lengthwise from the wall, and so placed, one above the other, as to represent steps. This arrangement was repeated at two or three places along the side. Above, it was the most wretched Gehenna imaginable. Mounds and rough hewn head-stones were huddled together so closely, and regardless of order, as to

suggest an earthquake, and so thickly interspersed and overgrown with nettles that it must have been a simple impossibility to recognise the features of any particular individual's last resting-place from another. And, that no mournful testimony might be wanting to the speedy oblivion and shortness of tenure they experienced, the place was strewed with remnants of coffins, bones, and fragments of skulls in perfectly unconsidered fashion, every new comer helping to displace some one who had kept his bed long enough, when beds were scarce. Nobody seemed at all shocked, although any man might have been treading on a crumbling relic of his nearest relation, with every step he took through the rank thicket of nettles. What did it matter to the poor wretches who came there to bury their dead out of

their sight? When life itself is so unlovely, who cares how doubly hideous death is?

Gwenda watched the procession winding slowly along the Kilcoran Road, the long-drawn wails drawing nearer, and rising and falling on the fitful breeze. But all of a sudden she was amazed to see the whole concourse break into a disorderly run, the coffin jolting and heaving on the shoulders of the bearers as if it were at sea. The *keening* stopped, and evidently some extraordinary excitement possessed the crowd.

And, in a few moments, the cause of this unseemly stampede showed itself in the presence of another funeral, which was being as rapidly conducted on the other side. For on the summit of the hill at the left appeared a rival procession, also

rushing, struggling, clamouring over the ground, with the evident object of trying to be at the graveyard first.

Then it came to Gwenda's recollection that the people had a peculiar superstition regarding this point. When a Catholic dies, and of course goes to purgatory, he, as the newest comer, has to perform certain offices for his fellow shades, till a yet newer arrival takes the burden off his shoulders. Now the last thing to desert an Irishman is his family pride. He may be in tatters, and at death's door with starvation himself, 'but, bedad, as long as he can handle a shillelagh, never will an O'Rooney have it to say that an O'Mulligan was sarvint to him!' So the question as to whether Misther O'Rooney is to be 'sarved' by Misther O'Mulligan, or *vice versa*, has to be decided there and

then by mortal combat. And the only surprising part of it is that the 'gin-tlemen in the coffin' do not, at the inspiriting crack of the shillelagh, come out themselves and challenge each other to a duel *à outrance* for the sake of the family honour, and quicker settling of the question.

As Gwenda looked on, shocked and terrified, the two streams met, under the graveyard wall. The coffins were set down with scant ceremony at the road-side, and a general scrimmage set in. The sounds of the blows testified to the hardness both of heads and sticks, and above this rose the wild shrieks and en-treaties of the women, who ran here and there, wringing their hands, and trying to drag fathers and husbands and brothers out of the *mêlée*.

Gwenda could not look on longer inactive. She had no definite idea as to what she could do to stop it, but at least she would try. She rushed like the wind down the avenue; but, as she got near the scene of action, she saw with delight that a much more potent advocate for peace was drawing nigh. For Father Tom was galloping towards them, brandishing his whip, and shouting as loud as shortness of breath and his extraordinary pace would let him.

'Ye haythins o' the world! Ye miserable, misguided savages! 'Tis ashamed I am to own ye!'—here he was near enough to administer a cut of his whip, and another and another. 'Take that, ye vagabonds — ye on-natural parricides!' The last word carried a certain awe with it, and his reverence had not time to con-

sider how it was applicable to present circumstances. ‘Lavin’ your dacent father an’ uncle lyin’ out there on the muddy road wid all the four winds whistlin’ round ’em, while ye maul and tear each other like snarlin’ hyenas o’ the wildherness! ’Tis ashamed all out I am o’ ye, Thady O’Mulligan, an’ you too, Tim O’Rooney. Is this the respect ye show yer religion?’

‘But, your riverence,’ expostulated Thady, who, in token of his filial affection, had the blood already flowing from a cut across his face, ‘what respect cud I have for my father, rest his sowl! if I was to be quiet, an’ let him go down to be a sarvint to Pat O’Rooney, that he was never evened to in all his life before?’

An angry flash shot from the eyes of his opponent, but for the moment he con-

trolled himself, as he turned to the priest with equal excitement.

'As long as I've a dhrop o' blood left in me, Father Tom, I'll not stand by an' see my uncle Pat brought to that—that he'd have to say there wasn't wan o' his own had the heart to stand up for him agin the O'Mulligans, whin it's the last that iver he can ask av us! Och, it's no use for ye to prache to me, your riverence. I'd sooner take another hundherd years o' purgatory mesilf than I'd be the black coward he'd have a right to call me!'

'Oh, ye poor omadhauns!' the priest muttered, with vexation. He knew the hopelessness of trying to combat a long-rooted superstition. And even while he hesitated,

'The war that for a space did fail
Now trebly thundering swell'd the gale,'

the combatants flying anew at each other, with blazing eyes and shouts of defiance.

The *keeners* had calmly seated themselves around and upon the coffins, prepared to await the result with philosophical composure.

Gwenda, shrinking behind the broad gate pillar, covered her eyes, as the blows grew faster, and one or two of the combatants fell staggering to the ground.

The priest charged into the centre of them, laying on his whip valiantly.

'Holy Vargin! is it murdher I'm to see done wid my own eyes, in the sight, too, o' the blessed dead? Hould on a moment! Pat O'Rooney, ye tearin' tiger, will ye listen to sinse? Och, thin, it's a rattlin' pinance I'll give yez for this! Hould on, I tell yez! Stop your hands a moment till I can spake.'

There was a truce declared—evidently intended to be brief—but the priest must get at least the politeness of a hearing. But every man's hand was held ready to strike the moment he should have had his say.

'Here now, listen! I can put the matther right, fair an' aisy for ye, an' ye can take home all the brains the Lord gave ye—throth, ye haven't too much to spare, sure enough—an' a whole skull to hould 'em. Let the two coffins be brought up the two different steps, an' lay 'em side by side fornenst the graves, an' I'll read prayers over 'em both together, an' ye can put 'em both in the ground at the self-same moment. There, now—doesn't that make it plain an' aisy?'

There was a pause of astonished consideration. It was such an amazingly

simple solution of the difficulty, that they were not at first inclined to accept it seriously. But, as it gave neither party a shadow of advantage over the other, it was presently accepted with acclamation, and cries of, 'Glory be to goodness! Sure there niver was the like o' Father Tom for makin' pace. Bedad, he'd outwit the divil himself!'

One or two of the men indeed had qualms of conscience as to whether it wasn't 'mane' of them to leave the settling of the disputed point of etiquette to the principals themselves.

'Faith, there'll be a pretty row over it, I'll go bail,' said one of them, scratching his head, as he thought of the sturdy whacks that had passed between the defunct heroes when Drimmeen fair was in all its glory.

'Don't ye be afther throublin' yerselves

about that,' said Father Tom, with dignity. 'See that ye shovel in the clay spade for spade—that's all ye have to consarn yerselves with.'

The coffins were carried up and laid by the respective graves. All knelt down, the men taking off their hats, and the priest, standing bareheaded between the two parties, with uplifted hand began his prayer.

Gwenda, infinitely relieved at the priest's clever stratagem, stole softly away. In the gleam of the setting sun she saw the crowd gradually disperse; save for one or two solitary figures—an old man with his grey locks lifted by the wind—and a black-cloaked woman or two—who remained kneeling by as much as they could find of the graves of their beloved dead.

In the meantime, Geoffrey had gone to

C——, where his 'very important business' resolved itself into aimless wanderings about the streets, and excursions nowhere in particular on rickety jaunting-cars. Of which exciting pastimes he tired in a day. Yet he could not make up his mind to take ship and leave for good and all.

At times he repented his hastiness; was half-minded to start back again—even though he slept on the floor of the watch-house—and be once more within possible touch of Gwenda's hand; nay, within even a distant sight of her, if no more might be safe.

But the remembrance of Darcy always came between him and this suggestion. What a poor, mendacious figure he would cut in presence of the successful suitor! It was not to be thought of.

At last, with a wrench, he tore himself abruptly from this scene, full of new emotions for him, bitter and sweet, and returned to Manchester, where he was received as a matter of course, and condoled with for his enforced exile among savages so long. This at least was his mother's notion of it. And Geoffrey accepted the condolences, studiously avoiding all details of his sojourn, beyond an assurance that he had been most hospitably treated by the kindest people in the world.

When he discovered that his portmanteau, with all that it contained, was strongly redolent of the invincible turf smoke, he kept it in his dressing-room, with the veneration of a pilgrim for a shrine, and resisted all suggestions to have

it 'aired,' or 're-lined,' 'or something to get rid of that horrid smoky smell.'

'And is it true that the women are all pretty there?' asked his mother, who had herself been a beauty in her time.

'There *are* some very good-looking ones among them,' Geoffrey answered, with tremendous indifference.

'Ah, of course you hadn't time to notice them much. You must have been so busy. Poor dear boy! It was a dull task, no doubt, and really very good-natured of you to undertake it. But I am so glad you are back; for your cousin Ethel is coming to stay a week or two, and I want you to show her some attention. You know what we wish about it, my dear Geoffrey.'

Oh, yes, he knew very well.

His mother, whose beauty had been her only dower, had unfortunately acquired a somewhat exaggerated respect for the consideration that wealth can bring. And his cousin Ethel, being in a fair way of inheriting not only her parents' share of it, but the additional earthly hamperings of a rich bachelor uncle, it had long been decided by the two mothers that heaven had intended them for each other from their cradles.

The peculiar process of reasoning that prompts this conviction is not always patent to the parties immediately concerned.

Geoffrey had never given himself any trouble to combat the idea. It would be time enough to do so when he had any serious thought of marrying, which, up to the present, he had not.

His father looked on amused at the sanguine manœuvring of the two women. He had not the slightest doubt that Geof would please himself when the time came, and he saw no reason why he should not. And Ethel did not strike him as the sort of girl who could capture and keep Geoffrey's not too impressionable affections.

Strange to say, Geoffrey now allowed himself to be dragged about to concerts and dances, bazaars, and archery and croquet parties, with a meekness that amazed himself as well as them, wondering all the time if there really was any possibility of his being made to forget Gwenda's sweet, thoughtful face, and the fathomless depths of her eyes, by looking at Ethel's china blue orbs, and listening to her babyish prattle and affectation.

He wondered how he could ever—when

he first came home from Eton—have thought her pretty. Yet, in good sooth, she *was* pretty—of the baby-faced, wax doll style of loveliness, very bewitching to her admirers.

He saw that, if he *had* to strive to forget Gwenda, it did not lie in the power of Ethel Winton—or, for that matter, any other Ethel he knew of—to make him do so. For a real passion makes one ultra critical of all rival perfections. No lips, no eyes, no voice, can hold for us a charm comparable to that of the one divine 'incomparable' she, who has taken possession of our heart, and will not be dislodged.

Poor Ethel never was so severely criticized. She was used to command a fair share of admiration from lisping youths, who wore primrose gloves, and smoked

big cigars in public—and Geoffrey perversely ignored everything but her faults, taking a magnifying glass even to look at them.

Walking with her, he thought how different her mincing airs were from Gwenda's unconscious, yet queenly grace. Dancing with her was still worse; oh, that never-to-be-forgotten waltz at Clovernook! And, when Ethel gave him her glove to button, he found himself comparing her plump short hand with the beautiful taper fingers he had watched as Gwenda poured out tea for them in the tiny drawing-room at the Tower.

No, decidedly, a young woman is not to be envied who comes between a lover and the vision of his joy.

One night, at a dance, they sat together in a conservatory. Geoffrey, with his

hands clasped behind his head, was listening vaguely to his companion's chatter, his eyes fixed on the purple flowers of a creeper that hung from the roof. His thoughts were so little with the present that he was not conscious of their lapsing presently into silence, and that Ethel was entertaining herself by looking over and revising her programme.

'I wish you would let me have that number eight waltz free again, Geoffrey,' she said, pulling the blossoms off a geranium that had the ill-luck to be near, as she spoke.

'Eh—what?' said Geoffrey, starting from a reverie.

'I do believe you've been asleep!' Ethel said, pettishly. 'I never saw anyone so much changed for the worse as you are, Geof. You used to be tolerably good

company, but now you are as stupid as ever you can be! You've just told me, when I asked if you didn't like white jasmine, that you didn't remember ever having tasted it!'

'My thoughts must have been running on supper,' said Geoffrey, laughing. 'Pray accept my apologies. What was it you wanted me to do for you?'

'Oh, it was nothing much. Only I thought, as you really don't care, you know—that I would like—I mean I would rather not be engaged for that eighth waltz.'

'Hum!' said Geoffrey. 'That is how I am to show my devotion, is it? And, pray, who is the favoured individual who is to supplant me—for whom I am expected to forego my just privileges?'

'Don't be absurd! Of course there

isn't anyone in particular, but—well, I like to keep a dance or two free.'

Ethel was too much engrossed with the cupids and roses on her fan to see the mischievous smile on Geoffrey's lips. But he knew well enough who his rival was. Indeed, at that very moment Geoffrey caught sight of his pinky face and yellow hair at the door of the dancing-room. Geoffrey at once sat up, and, leaning over, became also absorbed in admiration of the cupids on the fan, his dark head in tantalizing proximity to Ethel's fair ringlets.

'I can make a shrewd guess who he is, my coz,' said Geoffrey; 'you have had more than one dance with him to-night, already. What would your Aunt Blanche say?'

'Oh, I think it is really too bad of auntie and mamma. They treat me like a

baby! I cannot speak or dance with any-one unless he has been passed in review, and—and——'

'Declared eligible. Well, according to their view, there is nothing detrimental about Haining'—'except his looks,' he was very much tempted to add.

He wondered, glancing at him, was that the sort of fellow girls went crazy over—barber's-block looking things, whose 'whole mind' was given to their 'tie'? Seeing the young man's eyes wandering ever wistfully in their direction, Geoffrey still kept his head down, and discovered that his cousin's bracelet was a remarkably pretty one.

'Pshaw, Geof, do be serious. I wish you would be good-natured, and try to help me.'

'My dear, with the greatest pleasure in

life. What is it I can do for you? Put in a good word for you with Haining? Of course. From my cousinly experience, I can assure him——'

'Oh, I don't think he wants that, thanks. But do, dear Geof, get Aunt Blanche to believe that I may be trusted to choose my own partners——'

'For a waltz—*or* for life?' queried Geof, politely.

'It's perfectly exasperating—and—and *horrid* to be followed about so, and looked after, everywhere!' Ethel went on, tearfully.

'Poor little coz!' said Geoffrey, looking at her, meditatively. 'And so she's discovered she's got a heart, has she? I suppose we really *have* got such a thing, all of us?' he added, as if making quite a new physiological discovery. 'And you

wish me to understand that my unwelcome attentions must now cease?' he asked, with a burlesque of mournfulness that was too much even for Ethel's gravity.

'Oh, you ridiculous Geoffrey!' she said, laughing in spite of herself.

'Well, I'll see what can be done with my mother, Ethel. I sympathize with you entirely. But as to that waltz, you know—'

The rueful look in Ethel's face amused him.

'Come, I'll be magnanimous. There's Haining over there, glued to the door. He'll ask you for it in a moment, when we go back to the dancing-room. Go and be happy.'

And it was with something like a sigh of envy he saw them go off together. He was left to his own gloomy meditations in the dim half-light.

Falling back into his former attitude, with clasped hands behind his head, he lay looking up at the stars, which peeped through the glass of the roof wherever a break in the clinging green allowed. Tall feathery ferns made a pleasant screen at his side. They made him invisible, though he could see through them well enough.

He was tired of all this duty work, and glad to be relieved so easily of all responsibility as regarded Ethel. She was going to take the law into her own hands, and he was more than ready to abet her. Still, he had misgivings that there was a bad quarter-of-an-hour in store for them both. He was an affectionate son, and seldom crossed his mother's wishes. But there are limits!

'Poor Ethel! it *is* too bad!' he mused. ''Pon my soul, girls have a hard time of

it. Why the deuce should mothers and aunts interfere with the affections that ought to be absolutely and entirely their own, to give or withhold? Is it not enough to have Fate against one, as it is, nine times out of ten, in such matters?'

Fellow-feeling made him wondrous forbearing, even to Haining, whom in honest truth he could not help classifying, in his own mind, as a 'lisping idiot.'

'If Ethel likes him—as she appears to do—it's nobody else's concern. There's no accounting for tastes.—Good heavens! can she at all realize the prospect that's before her? Fancy sitting opposite that absolutely vacant countenance—that stubbly moustache—that mustard-coloured hair—for all the years of one's natural life! But Ethel herself would be very much of the same sort of trial to me. And

here again, my wise mother thinks it her mission to pull the strings. It appears that neither am I, any more than Ethel, supposed to be capable of choosing a partner with discretion.'

He smiled as Ethel's indignant face rose before him. Then, remembering where his choice had fallen, his dreams took a different shape.

It was two o'clock in the morning. Far from all this noise and whirl, she was sleeping now, his love, his queen! with the winds and the sea whispering through her dreams. How lightly the curl of her lashes would lie on the wild-rose cheek! How sweetly the breath would come and go through the parted lips! Almost he heard the sigh born of the balmy visions of sleep.

Visions?—dreams? Of whom?

The tendrils of the passion flowers overhead might have trembled at the repressed fierceness of the words that rose to his lips.

From the dancing-room came a swift, measured sound, 'the beat of the dancers' feet,' and with it the strains of a waltz. Oh, cruel chance! it was the waltz he had danced with Gwenda!

Sweet, tantalizingly sweet it sounded. Every bar, every note, had its momentary reminiscence. Here, the tiny curl on her forehead had brushed his lips; here again, her hand had slipped on his shoulder, and his arm drawn her closer as they moved. Now it was growing faster, the delicious dreamful whirl—faster—faster——

Dreams, dreams! Even as we reach forth to grasp them they 'make themselves air.'

'Never more.' These two words hold all the eloquence of despair.

The soul has its darkened chamber. Lay away in it the fair, sweet relics of memory. Cover them over with rosemary and rue. For they are dead as the leaves of autumn, as the rose of last year's June.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE OLD GENTLEMAN TAKES A TRIP.

Darcy and his bride had gone to Paris. Its gay life and new scenes were all very fresh and beautiful to Connie, who had never been across the silver streak before.

Especially did she enjoy the drives in the Bois, where the young buds were just beginning to show on the trees; the stately equipages of the old regime; the showier turn-outs, more pretentious, less refined both in equipment and occupants;

the brilliant dress; the flow and gaiety of the ever moving crowd—all these made a panorama she was never tired of watching.

It was a new revelation to her, this world of apparently constant ease and enjoyment. There seemed no shadow anywhere in its brilliant life—it was flooded, saturated with light from 'morn to dewy eve.'

And yet—now and again—she caught glimpses of faces that made her shudder—faces pinched and drawn with want—scowling with envy—black with despair

And then she remembered that within sight of the doors of stately Notre Dame, within sound of its pealing music, and the murmur of its mass, there stood the Morgue. Oh, the irony—the fierce mockery—there is in life! How the skeleton grins

and mouths at our feasts! How closely hollow-eyed want stalks in the footsteps of haughty luxury—and the velvet of pride and the rags of misery touch, as they pass through lofty cathedrals, portals where they had knelt together under the great Eye of Heaven!

The galleries of the Louvre proved a somewhat fatiguing work of exploration. Old masters and wonderful creations of the sculptor's art never had power to rise in Connie's eyes from the mere material out of which they were evolved. She only saw so many yards of canvas, covered with more or less hateful women and brawny men; so many big blocks of marble cut into the shapes of human beings, very much in need of the kind ministrations of a Dorcas Society.

Lawrence was more sensible to their

worth and grandeur. But his attention was apt to wander; and Connie grew impatient when his eyes took on a far-away look, and he stood at times beside some picture he neither saw nor was interested in, till her voice or touch broke the spell. Spoilt child as she was, she quickly resented the least show of inattention. 'He was really growing provokingly absent-minded,' she was obliged to confess.

Once, when they were crossing the Boulevards, they had to wait at a centre of refuge for some minutes, till the stream of traffic abated a little. And Lawrence, actually forgetting her presence, stepped off and walked across the wide street, leaving Connie stranded in astonishment and anger.

Yet, to do him justice—when not absent-minded—in affectionate care and at-

tention he was all that a husband could be—perhaps, indeed, too much of a husband, too little of the lover.

But these were only passing clouds upon their sun. Connie, though inclined to be *exigeante*, was not hyper-sensitive. They are widely different conditions.

So they went about gaily, looking into the beautiful solemn churches, so cold and dim, save where the radiance of heaven itself streams in overhead from great, glowing windows, with their pictured saints and angels. Wandering through the melancholy chambers of the Tuileries, with their faded yellow hangings and tabourets;—now vanished into the limbo of the past: leaving no trace of hearth or threshold.

Laughing, and being shocked a little, and laughing again at the pretty, witty,

not too strait-laced pieces so cleverly acted, as only French artists know how to act them. Taking boat to the sweet old sleepy places on the Seine, and watching the water rippling gently under a quiet bridge—guiltless now of any memory of fierce processions and royal victims borne ignominiously over it to their doom.

All and everything that Paris affords they saw and did. Some things Connie voted charming—they were generally the outdoor excursions; some again were unhesitatingly pronounced bores and delusions. Darcy took them all in their round, letting her lead him where she would, accepting her verdicts, and endorsing her opinions with exemplary self-effacement.

Mr. Standish had only waited for his daughter's marriage to start on his exploration voyage. Sorry as he was to lose her,

he found consolation in being at last free to put himself in the way of perfecting the theories that were the subject of half a lifetime's research. Their course was to be an uncertain one, as was the probable length of their absence. But all, fired by the noble ambition to seek out and record the truth, were as happy as though youth indeed had been at the prow, instead of the hoary figure-head of age.

In the meantime, Geoffrey had begun conscientiously to devote himself to business. He must have some distraction—as well that as any other. He set himself to the task of acquiring an insight into the working of the firm, so as to be able to relieve his father in some degree from work which had too long been exclusively on his shoulders.

One morning there arrived a letter from Captain Chetwynd, informing them that the hull of the *Belle Tremayne* was now stranded, and ready for breaking up.

'Some one must go down and see to it,' said the old gentleman, musingly. 'Your Uncle Joseph says that the copper and iron are decidedly worth looking after. She was splendidly finished, as all his ships are.'

Geoffrey was engaged in writing a letter, and made no reply.

'It's a dull undertaking for a young fellow, of course. You won't care, I suppose, to go again, Geof? Wilson can be spared pretty well just now; we'd better send him.'

Geoffrey got up and walked to the window; while his father, wondering at his

silence, lay back in his chair, and beat a soft tattoo with the paper-knife.

'To be, or not to be?'

Staying meant giving up all hope of ever seeing Gwenda more. It meant years growing on to years of lonely regret, of bitter envyings, and thoughts of what might have been. And memories that would not be killed—of a low, sweet voice—of starry eyes—of 'the touch of a vanished hand.'

But to go there, and find Darcy triumphantly installed, with a better—the only—right to hold that gentle hand, and search the depths of those sweet, true eyes. To know that he—Geoffrey—was *de trop*, wished away——

No, if he had any wisdom left, it must nerve him now to resist the strong temp-

tation, the longing to look upon her again, which was like the madness which makes poor wretches rush again into the flames from which they have just been rescued.

It was no light conflict which fought itself out there at the window, while the old man sat humming the 'British Grenadiers' to a paper-knife accompaniment on the blotter.

'Well, Geof, what do you say?'

His son turned, and walked to the table again, keeping his back to the light. He spoke composedly enough.

'I think, sir, it will be as well to send Wilson.'

'Yes—all right. I'll give him his directions at once. He's a plodding, steady fellow, that won't care a button how dead an' alive the place may be. I shouldn't wonder if it were rather a

welcome change to get away from that Xantippe of a wife.'

Geoffrey finished his letter, and went out.

On inquiring for him, however, it appeared that poor Wilson was in a worse grip than even Xantippe's. He had not turned up at the office that morning, but, instead, there had come a small representative of his numerous family with 'father's respecks, and he hoped Mr. Langdale would excuse his bein' in bed, very bad with the brown kiters and mustard plasters.'

The 'brown kiters' was an additional thorn in the flesh which this much-tried head clerk of Mr. Langdale's was called on to bear when east winds were rampant.

All of a sudden, Mr. Langdale was

seized with an inspiration. He would go himself!

'Yes, the more he thought of it, the more he was pleased with the idea. He should enjoy it. 'Twould be more of a change to him than Scarboro' or Whitby. Pah! he was sick of them both. And he thought he *did* want a little change. Geoffrey could take his place well enough for a week.'

So at luncheon he brought out his project with glee.

Geoffrey started a little.

'You will have to rough it a bit, you know, sir,' he said.

'Well, I'm not past roughing it a little, yet, I hope. By George! we older folks know better how to do that than some of you pampered young dandies.'

'Captain Chetwynd said the clergyman's room would be free about this time. I shouldn't wonder though if he insists on your staying with him.'

'Yes, I remember your telling me he expected to see an old fogey when he gave you his invitation. Well, I'll be glad to make his acquaintance.'

'He was going to make another acquaintance that he knew nothing of as yet,' thought Geoffrey.

He had been very reticent about the Tower. Something made it difficult for him to speak about Gwenda. And now he could not do so without entering into difficult explanations, and drawing more attention to the omission than was desirable.

His father would have exactly the

same experience as he had himself. He wondered how Gwenda's beauty would strike him. How he envied him the pleasant shock!

Thus it fell out that one afternoon, when Edson came up after dinner to his watch, he reported to the captain that 'the old gentleman was below.' An intimation which sounded a little superfluous, and made the captain stare.

'Eh—what?'

'Old Mr. Langdale, sir. He's at the station.'

'Ah, ah, I see. Of course. I'll go down then, at once. Gwenda, my dear, Mr. Langdale's at the station.'

It was perhaps as well that Gwenda was in the other room. He did not see her catch her breath and start.

'It's old Mr. Langdale, this time—come to see about the hull of the *Belle*. I'll bring him up to dinner, of course.'

So the captain went down to Dirrel Cove without further delay. He found a hale, white-whiskered old gentleman, with a pleasant, cheery face, seated at the door of the watch-house, Coble standing at his side, glass in hand.

'Glad to see you, Mr. Langdale,' said the captain, Coble saluting and sheering off. 'You're not afraid to trust yourself in our wilds, in spite of your son's experiences.'

'By Jove, sir, it was worth coming double the distance to see that,' answered his companion as they shook hands, and nodding towards the rocks. 'They are terrible, those—"swords," I think you call 'em?—much as one may admire their

grandeur. No wonder the poor *Belle* came to an untimely end. No quarter given there!'

'They are as deadly as a shark's mouth,' said the captain. 'Their record would be an appalling one, if Davy Jones would give us a peep at his log.'

'I've been getting a description of the wreck from that old salt. Good heavens, sir, it must have been a harrowing sight! Poor Brown! he was as good a skipper as ever walked deck—and his wife with him—and child. Very wrong, very wrong. I believe she was a foreigner, and he was taking her to see her friends. They will do these things, against all rules.'

They walked together down the slip, and surveyed the poor skeleton, fantastically hung with green, shiny weed and

long, brown tangles, all that remained of a gallant ship.

'I've arranged that competent men are sent down to-morrow to break her up,' said Mr. Langdale, watching the waves play round the blackened keel.

'May I ask which you are directly interested in—the ship or the cargo?'

'Oh, both. The cargo is, of course, all ours, but I have a part interest with my brother—Joseph Langdale, of Liverpool—in the ship. She was a first-rate vessel of her sort—called after and christened by my wife.'

Mr. Langdale—of Manchester—shook his head sadly as he looked down at the empty ribs of the poor *Belle*, and thoughtfully felt for his snuff-box.

'Given to this at all, sir,' he asked, tendering it to the captain.

This immediately produced a corresponding box from the captain, and they politely tried each other's mixtures.

'Well,' said the captain, 'we will talk over what's to be done with the hull at our leisure. You will, of course, stay at the Tower as long as you remain.'

'My dear sir, you are too good. You have already been so hospitable to my son, I feel ashamed to trespass further.'

'Pooh, pooh,' said the captain, 'in out-of-the-world places like this, it would be churlish indeed not to hold out a welcoming hand to a stranger. By the way, an old friend of mine, Keppel, is coming to dinner. You will find him a very good fellow.'

'Delighted to meet him,' answered Mr. Langdale; and the two old men walked leisurely up to the Tower together.

As they entered the drawing-room, Captain Chetwynd said, in his unceremonious way,

'My daughter, Mr. Langdale.'

His guest found himself gazing in astonished admiration at a tall, graceful girl, dressed in white cashmere, who rose to receive him, and put out her hand.

'Good heavens! how had Geoffrey never spoken of her? Such a lovely girl! such a smile!'

The old gentleman had an eye for beauty. He took her hand, and bowed over it with the courtly grace of a Chesterfield. He was next introduced to Lieutenant Keppel, who had been talking to Gwenda on their entrance. They chatted pleasantly together, but still Mr. Langdale's attention was given to Gwenda.

He could not help wondering over and

over again, 'What the deuce was the reason of Master Geof's silence about her?'

'And the young rascal had actually been domiciled under the same roof with this sylph, and had come off scatheless! —Had he, though? By Jove, now that he thought of it, there had been something devilish strange about his manner. Queer—very queer! Geof was not one of your backward Corydons, to be knocked over by a frown, either. By George, he should have jumped at the excuse for getting here!'

Dinner cut short his meditations, and he gallantly offered his arm to Gwenda. Sitting by her at the table, he found her manner and sprightly intelligence fully as charming as her face. Gwenda, indeed, was quite her natural self with the old man, who had all the pleasant, kindly

manner of one who could afford to think well of a world that had gone very well with him. And he was greatly interested in all he had seen on this side of the channel, and glad to have Gwenda's pretty lips to instruct him.

Geoffrey was mentioned accidentally—in connection with the work at the wreck.

'It was dull work for him, of course,' said the captain. 'One requires to be to the manner born to live long contentedly in a place like this.'

'Perhaps so,' said Mr. Langdale. 'At any rate, he is too busy dancing attendance on his mother and cousin to come down at present. And, 'pon my soul, I'm uncommonly glad of the excuse for taking the trip myself.'

He managed to steal a look at Gwenda in letting fly a random shot. But she

seemed perfectly composed and unconcerned. Geoffrey's name had apparently no power to flutter her.

In the drawing-room Gwenda, in response to Keppel's pleadings, sang: quaint old ditties that suited the full sweet tones of her sympathetic voice. She seemed to know every old ballad that was ever made, and one after another they asked for them. She never attempted anything more ambitious, yet these she rendered with a pathos, a wonderful insight into their truth and feeling that was a new revelation of their worth to the ears that already loved them.

'Ah,' said Mr. Langdale, with a sigh of pleasure, 'that finds the way to an old fogey's heart before all the fiddle-scraping and shakes and quavers of a whole Italian opera. What say you, Captain Keppel?'

'I feel very much as you do,' answered Keppel, 'though I have to plead guilty to being a fiddle-scraper myself; but I reserve the infliction strictly for my enemies. There is something strangely fascinating in these old ballads—perhaps it is the half-tragic, half-humorous nature of the words that make them seem so true, so full of natural human interest. And they seem to fit the crooning, dreamy airs that belong to them so well.'

'By Jove! sir, they starve us out now-a-days with their bravuras, and cavatinas, and what-not. My dear, never waste your sweet voice on them.'

Gwenda laughed.

'I can very safely promise that,' she said.

'Ah,' said Mr. Langdale, 'new things keep crowding out the old, but, 'pon my

soul, I can't see that the world's a whit the better for 'em. You're nearer Arcadia here, Captain Chetwynd, than any of us ever will be again. Don't let it be invaded by the shams and fripperies of the Philistines.'

. . . .

Mr. Langdale found the few days of his sojourn pass most agreeably. He was interested and curious about the habits of the country and condition of the people, and insisted on accompanying Gwenda to her post at the soup-kitchen, where he had an opportunity of seeing for himself something of the existing state of things, but imperfectly realized, at that time, out of Ireland.

And, on leaving, he deposited a hand-

some sum in Mr. Sedley's hands towards furthering the good work of which he was secretary.

On getting back to Manchester, he found Geoffrey attending with exemplary diligence to the various details of business, which he had set himself to master under Wilson's careful tutelage.

His father looked somewhat keenly at him, as he spoke of the captain's daughter.

'Why, Geof, how the deuce did you keep so close about this lovely girl? By Jove! I was never more thunderstruck in my life! Why, she's fit to be a duchess—a queen, by George!'

Every beat of Geoffrey's heart echoed the words. He was leaning on the mantelpiece, with his face turned away.

'How you could have been under the

roof with her, and not lost every vestige of heart you possess, beats me.'

'Fortunate for me if I did not,' answered Geoffrey, with a laugh that did not sound very mirthful. 'She's engaged.'

'Oh, ho!' said his father, and his mouth formed the silent preparation for a whistle. Light began to break in upon what had puzzled him in Geoffrey's manner. He pulled his whiskers, and looked at his son's bent head thoughtfully.

'I'll tell you what, Geof,' he said, presently, *àpropos* of nothing particular, 'the *Naiad* is lying up at your uncle's. Go and have a cruise of a few months in her. I don't want you. I'm fit for any amount of work after that trip. Go off at once to the Mediterranean, or Norway, or anywhere else you've a fancy for, and

don't come back till—you feel quite fit again.'

Geoffrey raised his head, and met the kindly gleam of his father's eyes, as he looked at him through his spectacles.

'It is really too good of you, sir, to suggest my going away again so soon after my long absence. You have such a lot to look after—and I was beginning to fancy I might be of some slight use to you at last.'

'Pooh, my lad, you will be of much more use when you return after a proper setting up. You have not been looking up to the mark since—' he checked himself, and altered his sentence to 'for some time back.' 'Sea air is the thing—the fresh breezes of the Atlantic, you know,—not Margate and periwinkles and nigger-minstrels, and old ladies in Bath-chairs—

oh, no. Faith, I never knew the virtue of strong briny air till now. I walked the two miles to the office to-day as if I were merely crossing the garden; not a bit blown. I'll write to Joseph to see about the *Naiad.* You'd better look out some fellow to go with you—Cotter or Jack Spencer, or both, if they're free.'

Geoffrey appreciated his father's delicacy in keeping clear of direct reference to his feelings. We shrink from the touch of even a healing finger when the wound is new and raw. But he felt a little ashamed of having to go abroad to seek distraction like some sentimental miss. He would have to bear his trouble some time or other; let him face it at once like a man.

How good his father was about it. Strange that, with all her love for him, his mother did not understand him quite

so well as the dear old dad did! Bless him for his praise of Gwenda!—though of course there could be no two opinions as far as she was concerned. But it would be too mean and cowardly to take advantage of his father's good-nature. After all, good hard work was always supposed to be the panacea for disappointment such as his.

But as the days went on, and the restlessness of unhappiness took hold of him, he began more and more to turn wistfully to the refuge of change and movement.

And at last he gave in to his father's reiterated advice. He sought out his former companion, Jack Spencer, and once again they started to re-visit the delicious blue bays of the Mediterranean in the *Naiad.* Jack was a rollicking youth, a fellow with no nonsensical sentiment about

him, as he was himself proud to proclaim. Just the right sort of companion for Geof at present, his father said.

But somehow Jack's jokes and lively sallies palled a little on Geoffrey this time. Whether it was that he had heard, and laughed consumedly over, most of them before—or, more probable still, was not now 'i' the vein'—they fell flat as a leaky bottle of champagne ten times out of a dozen.

On moonlight nights, when the yacht was lying like a sleeping bird on the water, and only the faint, soft swish of scarcely-moving waves broke the silence, with occasional sighs through the sails such as a child gives in sleep; while the phosphorus gleamed in their wake, and sweet, mysterious sounds came to them on the fitful breeze that might be the songs

of peasant women on the land as they wended homeward from a day of toil, or the voices of the sirens and mermaids that on such a night would sit and sing on weed-draped rocks, luring mortals to blissful death, under the silvery waves.

When the long, straggling crescent of Naples, with its myriad twinkling, yellow stars, showed white over the water's edge, with Vesuvius's puff of flame and smoke glowing in the distance, and above and around them the solemn hush of a perfect night, Geoffrey, listening to the whispering water and sighing of the flapping sails, gave Jack but poor encouragement to be merry; and that lively youth was driven after one or two mortifying failures—several excellent jokes missing fire like damp squibs—to seek the more genial company of the skipper, who looked on

him with a partial eye, as a 'fellow of infinite jest.'

They did not hamper themselves with any settled line of route. They simply went and came as the spirit moved them, now forward, now back, running in and out of the little sunny bays to buy fresh fruit, or renew their supply of water from tiny fountains almost hidden by fronds of fern and cool green moss, where the dark-browed contadine stood and chattered, and smiled at the compliments paid in very indifferent Italian by the English signori.

At Rome they spent a few mad hours, as in duty bound, at the Carnival, helping to swell the tide of merry misrule, so strangely out of keeping with the crumbling majesty of the dead past, that, if one

were to paint the lips and cheeks of the Milo Venus, and hang garlands from her armless shoulders, it would hardly seem more incongruous than this harlequinade upon the grave of history.

They threw flowers and compliments, *badinage* and *confetti*, till they were well-nigh hoarse and blind.

They fell in here with friends: pretty women whose acquaintance they had made in a former sojourn.

One, an Italian contessa, had found a soft spot in Geoffrey's heart at that time —he was now glad to meet her again. They danced and flirted as of yore, and Geoffrey would fain have persuaded himself he was as much her slave as ever. He could not deny that her dark velvety eyes had as fine a glow, her sun-warmed cheek

as clear a bloom, as they showed for him a year ago. Yet——

Not always 'in their ashes live our wonted fires.'

She saw a difference quickly enough—in him.

'What have you been doing, my friend, since we stood in this balcony together, last year? Last year!—how long ago that sounds like. One might as well say last century.'

Geoffrey shrugged his shoulders.

'Existing somehow. You know we hardly do more up there in our frigid island.'

But her brown eyes still rested on him musingly.

'You have had experiences, nevertheless,' she said; 'and not entirely happy ones.'

Geoffrey laughed—a little uneasily.

'When did you turn Sibyl?' he asked. 'Shall I hold out my hand?'

'There is no need. I read my fortunes in the face,' she answered, turning away with a faint sigh.

Leaning over the balcony, she took the knot of crimson carnations from her breast and held them loosely in her hand. A carriage, full of noisy occupants, was stayed for a moment by the crush, just below. She let the flowers drop as if absently, and they were caught and held with extravagant demonstrations of delight to the heart of a harlequin, who with clown and columbine were deligbing the laughing crowd.

'Why did you do that?' cried Geoffrey. 'You had promised them to me!'

'Had I?' she said, lightly. 'They were faded.'

Thus they drifted on. Pausing a while beside sweet Sorrento, with its terraced gardens over-hanging the lapping water, and its air full of the scent of oranges and lemon blossom—a place to dream away one's life in, never remembering that there was any other paradise.

'It makes one think of those lotus-eating fellows, you know,' said Jack, from the depths of a hammock-chair, where he was lazily sending rings of cigar-smoke to float away on the shimmering air. 'How does it go?

> "With half-shut eyes ever to seem,
> Falling asleep in a half-dream."

My case at present exactly.'

'Geof, you lubber, you have no soul. Why don't you wax poetical, as I do?'

'I suppose because "the gods" haven't made me "powetical," like Audrey,' said Geof. 'Though, if I were chock-full of poetry, I would not let it all off in smoke as you do.'

'Oh, I feel I was intended for a poet!' said Jack, with a sigh, as he lit a vesuvian. 'The only thing wanting is—er—er—power of expression, you know. Otherwise, I've all the requisites. By Jove! there's the dinner-bell! Welcome sound! I've noticed that nothing gives one such an appetite as sea air.'

'Except poetry,' said Geof.

As a change from dreamy sweetness, they would shoot across to rocky Capri, where the sun sinks nightly to his couch

of liquid fire; and buy corals from the first dark-eyed vendor, to be given away again to the contadini on the opposite shores.

Anchoring a while at Venice, to glide about in gondolas, and listen to sweet voice music, under the winking stars. Floating through dark, silent, water streets where the grated windows of deserted palaces frowned prison-like at the intrusion; palaces whose marble steps once echoed to the tread of stately doge and noble following; now silent and weed-grown; green with slime; fretted by the restless, melancholy sea. In that mixture of laughter and sadness, of beauty and desolation, of the sweet, fresh life of flowers, and glancing eyes and music, and the gloom of a dead grandeur and forgotten power, they laughed and trifled—

choking down the under-note of sadness, as we all do.

And floating out again on sunny afternoons, till, abandoned of the sleepy winds, they lay, with perfume of citron and myrtle heavy on the air, and laughter of invisible merry-makers coming clear and startling from the shore. Such afternoons as make one long for the power to bid all time stand still. Let there be no more of anything—ambition, struggle, passion, the lust of gain, the pride of life—give us only this :—rest, and sunshine, and peace!

All that they had done before they did now, and more. Who does not know what one can do, with a yacht at command on the Mediterranean?

Yet—that little word, yet! How it qualifies our joys—how it suggests a flaw

in the emerald—a canker at the heart of the rose!

They did all this. And one of them sought diligently for pleasure in her leafy bowers, and burnt incense at her shrine; but the coy nymph hid herself, obstinately implacable, and would not be wooed. If he caught glimpses of her indeed, at times, it was only to sigh out, 'She is changed, she is not so fair as she used to be!'

Perhaps, in some measure, Mr. Langdale's prescription was of service. Geoffrey manfully tried to lose himself in new scenes, new interests. If a man cannot send his spirit out in a given direction as he would an arrow—if, on the contrary, it persists in flying back to one unchanging goal—to the one ark of rest and

joy the world holds for it—who is to blame?

Fate—perverse fate; who is ever at loggerheads with the tiny god, and takes infinite pleasure in spoiling his best day's work.

And, while Geoffrey was eating his heart out with bitter envyings of Darcy's supposed happiness as Gwenda's favoured lover, Kilcoran was undergoing a much-needed process of renovation in prospect of its master's return with quite another bride.

It gladdened the heart of Phil Darcy to see the old place being furbished up and made festive for the young couple. Once more gates began to hang on their own posts; carts, considerately provided with their proper complement of wheels, and

made glorious with paint, returned to their original functions; racks and mangers were mended, hedges clipped, and gravel walks weeded and rolled.

The old house was an ugly one at best; an army of æsthetes could not make it anything else. But the melancholy impression of neglect and decay, which had been the prevailing feeling on first seeing it, was now giving way to a sense of trim freshness, less depressing, if hardly more picturesque.

Yet it was not the improvement in the place itself that was the source of Philip Darcy's content; it was the evidence it gave of the presence of money. How strangely a certain class of minds are given thus to worship the means, disregarding the end! He did not particularly care himself whether the hall-door

stood ten years or fifty without the favour of a coat of paint; or though half the panes of glass in the house were plastered up with brown paper—in the traditional Irish mansion are not these inconvenient apertures commonly the receptacles for such portions of the master's wardrobe as he is not immediately wearing?

He was not at all incommoded by the fact that the dining-room chairs were showing considerably more of the internal economy of their seats than of the cracked and whitened morocco, their original covering. His own easy-chair suited him well enough, though the horse-hair was bursting out at all corners, and but a small percentage of its brass nails remained *in situ*.

But money—money was the talisman to make everything work smoothly. No

more half-veiled insolence from long unpaid tradesmen; no more difficulties about seed and top-dressing, and labour and implements for the farm. No more land going back to primeval wildness for want of the hoe and the harrow; no more dunning letters; no more watered and fiery whisky, in place of the 'right Nance,' or pure cognac of other days—not to speak of the genuine 'crathur' which no gentleman's establishment ever should be without.

Never once did it trouble him to think that this son of his had all his race's characteristics and failings—that he had married without a spark of real, earnest love—and that the woman whose worldly goods now endowed him (it is not thought necessary, for truth's sake, to reverse the arrangement of this declaration in the

marriage-service) was almost as certain, some day, to weep the bitter tears of heart-weariness and neglect as were the leaves to fall when autumn winds should blow.

If there did come to him, out of the glow of the fire, the memory of a sad young face, with wistful eyes searching pitifully for a lost happiness, for the trust and faith that had withered away like flowers plucked and thrown aside by careless hands—he crushed it back again.

'What had he to do with the past? Let it bury its dead.'

He had it not in him to feel very keenly about anything; he had not, either, sufficient sensitiveness in his own organization to allow him to come within measurable distance of realizing what slow torture he had once made a woman suffer. A woman

who—coming to him with all the glamour of her own pure ideals throwing its hallowing medium between them, believing in his strength and worth and truth as children believe unwaveringly in the existence of good—had day by day, drop by drop, to taste the bitterness of awakening; till at last the gilding was all washed off the idol, the feet of clay revealed, the valley of desolation reached.

Philip Darcy had very little consciousness of having failed much in his duty as a husband. How could a man, the motions of whose spirit never freed themselves for an instant of the earth with which they were clogged and tainted, know anything of how a fair lily soul, that sought ever to lift its head heavenward, pined and shrank at the sullying contact?

That she had been too good for him he knew, and shrugged over. She was in too great haste to get to heaven. Angels are out of place in this work-a-day world.

'What idiots women are in setting up impossible standards for themselves and others, and crying because they can never be reached.'

'Why shouldn't Lawrence make as good a husband as another?'

Why not, indeed? if he meant another Darcy.

'Connie Standish was a sensible girl enough, not puling and sentimental—and she rode well to hounds—better that than sitting nursing grievances at home (though women were a deuced bore in the hunting-field, and only helped to spoil a run for some good man). Old Standish had given her her head too much, too. Lawrence

might find it a tough job to get the bit out of her teeth. Well, that was his affair.

'What a splendid crop of turnips and mangles those west fields would yield! Jack Casey should be paid his seed-bill, for once, on the nail. Damn his impudence—he was ready enough to cringe now!'

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

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